2005

Text messages : Talking about race, class, and gender in youth cyberspaces

Alyssa Richman
San Jose State University

TEXT MESSAGES
TALKING ABOUT RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN YOUTH CYBERSPACES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Sociology

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Alyssa Richman

May 2005

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Dr. Susan Murray, Department of Sociology
Committee Chair

Dr. Deanna Fassett, Department of Communication

Dr. Amy Best, George Mason University

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

TEXT MESSAGES
TALKING ABOUT RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN YOUTH CYBERSPACES

by Alyssa Richman

This project is a qualitative research study of the ways youth use online interactional spaces such as bulletin boards in an attempt to uncover how young people make sense of race, class, and gender identities in cyberspace. Understanding the ways in which social identities and inequalities are taken-up online is central to an understanding of the ways that individuals come to make sense of self and community as increasing amounts of time are spent in virtual worlds.

Using various qualitative methods, I examined the interaction that occurs on youth-centered bulletin boards. I then connected those interactions to larger issues of youth identity and the Internet as a site where youth cultures are socially constructed. My research reveals the complex ways that these online spaces both uphold relations of gender, racial, and class inequality while at the same time offer young people the space to challenge and disrupt those dynamics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I began volunteering with a youth program in which trained high school students provided dating violence counseling for other young people via an online chat room. During one of my shifts, I witnessed an exchange between a teen counselor and her chatter that forever changed the ways in which I thought about online identity. After counseling the chatter for about an hour, the 16-year-old white volunteer I was supervising was asked, "BTW, what race are you?" (BTW is chat shorthand for "by the way"). The counselor turned to me with a surprised and puzzled look on her face, "What should I tell her?" she asked. "What do you want to tell her?" I responded. After a minute or two of internal debate, the teen counselor responded, "I'm Italian."

It was in that moment that I realized that race and racial identity are in fact meaningful, and made meaningful, in these "anonymous" online spaces. Once touted as the great equalizer, a space in which the racial, gender, and other social inequalities of the corporeal world would be replaced by a level virtual playing field for all folks (Bajak 1993; Roberts 1993), the Internet has instead become both a new medium *and* a new site in which various social inequalities are created, recreated, and upheld. Understanding the ways in which racial, ethnic, gender, age, and sexual identities are taken-up online is central to an understanding of the ways that individuals come to make sense of self and community as increasing amounts of time is spent in virtual worlds.

My research examines the ways in which young people online negotiate issues of online identity, specifically racial, gender, class, and sexual identities. Several sociologists point to the importance placed on constructed Internet selves (Turkle 1995;

Smyres 1999). Many folks invest as much time and effort managing their virtual identity(ies) as they do managing their "real life" identities. These "virtual selves" are rarely constructed as devoid of race or gender, but instead are often firmly situated within the context of racial and sex categories, making online spaces an important site in which individuals come to make sense of social identities, and therefore worthy of sociological attention.

With the proliferation of the Internet as a communication medium, the *constructed* nature of these identities becomes increasingly salient. In this historical moment, email addresses are traded like phone numbers and linked together, creating giant virtual message chains and connecting users around the nation and around the world. Instant messaging ("IM-ing") is a text-based conversation format in which a single person can and does carry on completely separate conversations with multiple other users, bouncing between each with the click of a mouse. Chatrooms and bulletin boards function as infinitely large virtual meeting spaces where strangers meet among a cacophony of other voices to discuss topics ranging from pornography to car repair to popular television programs. With the explosion of these various forms of communication, collectively termed *computer-mediated communication*, the study of the ways people come to make sense of their own identities as well as the identities of others *through interaction*, both with and within these virtual spaces, is of great importance.

In his discussion of the key tenets of symbolic interactionist theory, Blumer (1969) argues that meaning is not derived from within the object (person or event) or from within the individual actor. "Symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social

products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer 1969:5). No meaning exists for an object, event, or *social identity* prior to social interaction. Instead meaning is created and recreated through the process of interaction and interpretation. The meanings of social identities, such as "black," "white," "boy," "girl" are all created interactionally and under constant negotation. Theoretical discussions of the creation of meaning through interactional processes are particularly important in the analysis of social identities and their construction in online spaces.

Expanding upon the theoretical work of Blumer (1969), Goffman (1959), and Garfinkel (1967, 1970), Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) discuss the performative nature of gender in their pivotal writing "Doing Gender." They argue that gender is not assigned or achieved but instead constantly performed, interpreted, and accomplished. "Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). Extending this theoretical argument, racial, age, class, and sexual identities can be seen as similarly accomplished. The inherently constructed nature of computer mediated communication makes performativity theory a useful model to understand online identities. "As [users] participate, they become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction" (Turkle 1995:12). I am interested in the ways that young people actively "do" gender, race, and class within these virtual spaces that both challenge and reinforce sociological notions of these identities.

In addition to more general questions about identity, the Internet as a site of youth involvement, where youth culture is formed and experienced, makes issues of youth identities particularly relevant to the study of cyberspace. According to a 2001 study by the National Center for Education Statistics, about 31 million Americans between the ages of 5 and 17 use the Internet. Forty-seven percent of youth between the ages of 11-14 report using the Internet for e-mail or instant messaging, and 14.3% for participating in chatrooms (DeBell and Chapman 2003).

For a variety of reasons, young people are almost seamlessly adopting these new forms of computer-mediated communication, and in many cases leading the way, while adults are left trailing behind, struggling to catch up (Turkle 1995). In her book *Virtual Ethnography*, Christine Hine argues that the Internet must be seen (and studied) *both* as a place "where culture is formed and reformed" *and* also as a cultural artifact, "produced by particular people with contextually situated goals and priorities" (2000:9). Using this twofold approach to Internet research, I was attentive to the Internet both as a site where youth cultures are located and as a product of the youth cultures themselves, and the ways in which this dual location informs the sense making activities of young people related to race, gender, class, and sexuality.

As a feminist researcher, I ascribe to the belief that theory should necessarily be tied to emancipation and not just remain theory for theory's sake. It is with this in mind that I take up questions of identity, youth cultures, and the Internet. As computer-mediated communication becomes increasingly integrated into many aspects of everyday life, and particularly the lives of young people, there is an escalating responsibility to

understand its relationship to social inequality. Not a simple relationship by any means, computer-mediated communication may uphold (and possibly magnify, as seen by emerging theories of the "digital divide") traditional forms of social inequalities as well as create new social inequalities of which researchers have not yet conceived. However, as this new body of research is showing (Haraway 1994; Lipton 1996; O'Brien 2000), these relatively new technologies are giving sociologists new ways to think about social identities. This is likely to alter the ways in which individuals make sense of social inequalities, and possibly offer greater insight into methods for combating social inequalities and working toward social justice.

No longer merely a novelty or passing trend, computer-mediated communication is firmly entrenched in the social landscape of the United States, and for many of us, "real life is just one more window" (Turkle 1995:13) on the desktop of our social selves. The study of online identity construction and performance and its relationship to youth cultures is central to understanding the ways online worlds are inhabited, but it may also offer additional insight into the nature of identity construction more generally.

After reviewing the relevant sociological literature concerning social identities in cyberspace, general youth studies, and critical studies of youth online, and a detailed discussion of my methodology, my analysis addresses the following research questions: 1) In what ways are race, class, and gender performed in online youth spaces? 2) How are racial, gender, and class inequalities created and upheld in these spaces? And 3) What is the emancipatory potential of computer-mediated communication and in what ways do young people actively disrupt social inequalities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

killadave: hi kris i like you
Kris: GUNS DUN KILL PPL,DANGEROUS MINORITIES DO
Kris: I'MA DANGEROUS MINORITY AND PROUD
Kris: ghost who u talkin to?
ghost_thug: dont say just minorites kill
ghost_thug: white peopl kill more
Kris: ALRIGHT
Kris: I'M AZN
Kris: YAY!
Kris: FLIP AMERICAN
Kris: ne wayz lemme change it
Kris: guns dun kill ppl,dangerous ppl do
killadave: :-x i love dangerous kris :- :-x
Kris: thas much better
Kris: ummm...kill...ren't u a girl?
Kris: ima gurl btw
killadave: no
Kris: um..
Kris: i swear u sed u were
Kris: i must b losing it
Kris: GUNS DUN KILL PPL.DANGEROUS PPL DO

excerpt from online chatroom[1]

"Ummm...ren't u a girl?"
A Review of Literature on Social Identities and Inequalities on the Internet

Although I anticipated the importance of gender and race online, I never imagined that my first foray into a chatroom as a researcher would provide such a rich look at the salience of social identity in the new frontier we call cyberspace. Coined in 1984 by science fiction author William Gibson, the term "cyberspace" has come to represent the virtual space in which we surf the web, send and receive email, chat with strangers, or instant message our friends. As our lives become increasingly enmeshed with these technologies, understanding the ways that gender and racial identities are interactionally negotiated in online spaces becomes important to our understanding of the Internet as a social space. In this section I will look at the ways that social researchers have studied

[1] For a discussion of screen names and anonymity, see Methods chapter.

online identities, examine the benefits and limits of various perspectives, and finally situate my own research in relation to these other theoretical projects.

Our Dream for the Global Village: Early Thoughts on the Internet

When the Internet, as we now know it, was coming into its own in the early 1990s, the popular press was mesmerized. Articles in newspapers and magazines flooded our consciousness with ideas about this enormous computer network on which we would be able to travel "around the world in 80 megabytes" (Bajak 1993:A4) and find everything from "reviews of kosher restaurants, ski conditions and Hollywood gossip" to "sports schedules and job lists, travel guides and Nielsen ratings" (Roberts 1993:A1). The Internet was understood and thus constructed by these popular accounts as a new frontier with unlimited possibilities for connecting people. A reporter for the Associated Press wrote, "We are circuit riders on the Internet, traffickers in worlds, images and sounds in a parallel virtual world where people share research and dreams, bridge cultural gaps, even help save lives. All without the need to physically meet" (Bajak 1993:A4). In this account, the Internet is constructed as a cross between the dark future landscape of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and the idealized melting pot fantasy of Disney World.

In many ways, these dreams of connecting people have come true. I can sit in my living room and chat in real time with my best friend 3000 miles away for free!....well, for the cost of my $50 DSL connection each month, my $1200 laptop computer, and a wireless network managed by my partner who works for a major computer company. Little was being said in the early 90s in the popular press about the ways that social

identities would be meaningful, aside from the occasional vague reference to the potential it will have to "bridge cultural gaps." Statements such as these and talk about the "common language" of the Internet (read: English) planted the idea that social inequalities would be erased in this new cyber-land. According to Bajak (1993), "on the Internet now, the homebound senior citizen and the blue-collar worker are starting to rub keystrokes with the particle physicist" (p. A4). These conceptions of the Internet are important not for their ability to predict the future, but for their ability to shape common beliefs about this technology. These journalists are not making connections to the larger social realities that are shaping the new communication medium. The Internet does not exist in a vacuum, outside of the social structure of "real life." Instead, as many researchers have found, identity work is a central feature of online communication, and social inequalities are being reproduced on the Internet in a variety of ways that mirror our offline lives (Burkhalter 2000; Ignacio 2000; O'Brien 2000). However, before examining these arguments, we need to look at their predecessors—theories of the freedom of cyberspace community.

The Early Pioneers: Networks, Community, and Freedom

Some of the first social scientists to take up the Internet as a site of study were sociologists of science, already interested in the ways that computers and various technologies were changing our lives. The most prominent of these theorists, Sherry Turkle (1995, 1996) and Howard Rheingold (1993), share the belief in the power of computer networks and computer-mediated communication to bring people together and

provide a useful way to make connections in our increasingly disconnected and fragmented "real" lives.

In his book *The Virtual Community*, Rheingold shares a vision similar to the journalists quoted above of a new world of interconnected possibilities. However, he looks to the Internet with a sociological eye, and his enthusiasm for the potential of these new cyberspaces is tempered by his questions about their impact on interpersonal relations and the potential for panopticon-like control over citizens (Rheingold 1993). One of the first Internet researchers to apply Goffman's (1959) theories of face-to-face interactions and his dramaturgical approach to computer-mediated communication, Rheingold offers an early look at online interaction. However, it is important to consider his work (and all work) as situated within a particular location and originating from a particular historical moment. In many ways, the purpose of his book was to introduce people to these new telecommunications networks that were still in their infancy. While he offers an important meta-narrative about the larger place of the Internet within society and its impact on government, education, communities, and other social institutions, he is less attentive to the interactional dynamics that make up the everyday experiences of people online.

Discussions of identity only seem to be present in these early works through study of MUDs or Multi User Domains. Similar to face-to-face role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, MUDs continue to be a popular subject for Internet researchers (Turkle 1995; Hall 1996; Danet 1998; Kolko 2000). Turkle describes MUDs as "a virtual social space that exists on a machine. MUDs are social virtual realities" (1996:156).

Basically large chatrooms, MUDs are text-based games in which individuals construct characters and interact with characters constructed by other players. Turkle (1996) is interested in the ways that identity is constructed through an individual's creation of characters and use of these online spaces. However, her research is grounded in face-to-face interviews and focus groups with players and not in a textual analysis of the actual interactional work being done in these MUDs.

This type of offline research divorced from the actual online interaction points to an important limit of the work of theorists such as Rheingold and Turkle. For these theorists, the self is seen not as constructed interactionally, but instead as the product of some internal consciousness. While Turkle does recognize the action of authorship in the presentation of self online—"MUDs serve as places for the construction and reconstruction of identity" (1996:157)—she sees this work as entirely the domain of the individual and not a joint project negotiated by all users within the space. Turkle (1995) describes personal computers as similar to a psychologist's Rorschach inkblot test in their ability to project personality. When discussing the projection of personality on MUDs she theorized that "...people are acting as authors not only of text but of themselves" (1996:156). This question of authorship and presentation of self will play a prominent role in future theories of online identities, utilizing the concept of the cyborg.

The Cyborg Potential: Disrupting the Gender Dichotomy?

A pervasive and hopeful theme in much of the work on identity on the Internet, particularly the feminist analyses of gender online (Haraway 1994; Turkle 1995; Lipton 1996; Turkle 1996; Danet 1998) is the notion that cyberspace offers the hope of "gender-

free" communication (Danet 1998). This body of work outlines the potential for women and men to finally be free of the limitations of corporeal bodies as we navigate integrated computer networks. With her now famous battle cry, theorist Donna Haraway frames this debate, "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (1994:452).

Haraway's concept of the cyborg is a complex and highly theoretical attempt to reconcile Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, science, and technologies in an effort to:

> contribute to the socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history. Nor does it mark time on an oedipal calendar, attempting to head the terrible cleavages of gender in an oral symbiotic utopia or a post-oedipal apocalypse. (Haraway 1994:425)

The cyborg has no ties to or roots in the biological, natural, or social constructions of gender and it is therefore the ultimate form of freedom (Haraway 1994). But freedom from what?

It is this notion of freedom that has enticed other theorists who work on issues of gender identity in online spaces. Drawing from Haraway's work as well as Saussure's poststructuralist linguistics, Mark Lipton (1996) examines the ways that cyberspace and cybersex complicate our notion of "sex" in the broadest sense of the term. In his aptly title essay "Forgetting the Body: Cybersex and Identity," he argues that as we represent our bodies online, defining ourselves becomes a conscious process during which we can modify the signs and change how we identify ourselves and others (Lipton 1996). Cyberspace will allow the transcendence of physical bodies by imagining virtual bodies. According to Lipton, "Dominant notions, such as the biological codes of sex and gender, will no longer serve to situate the body in developing cyberspace technologies. As a

result, it becomes increasingly easier to think of gender, gender roles, and even sex as social constructions" (1996:346). The potential to escape the confines of the body are within reach, and with the ability to choose from an unlimited sea of possibilities, the "standard human body" will no longer be privileged.

In a similar vein, Brenda Danet (1998) examines the potential for Internet "gender-play" in disrupting traditional gender dichotomies that have long vexed feminists. Through online "cross-dressing," "textual masquerade" (text as mask), and the choice of gender-neutral characters while gaming, computer-mediated communication becomes a possible site where in the binaries of male and female become much more complex (Danet 1998). While she acknowledges other research on the reproduction of gender inequalities in online interactional spaces, Danet argues that this medium is potentially liberating. "In text-based, digital communication, conventional signals of gender, such as intonation and voice pitch, facial features, body image, nonverbal cues, dress, and demeanor, are absent. Thus the idea of gender-free communication becomes conceivable for the first time" (Danet 1998:136). However, as with Haraway's notion of the utopian cyborg, this idea of "freedom from" needs to be more closely examined.

When liberal cyberfeminists point to the potential of freedom from the limitations of bodies on the Internet, caution must be used in adopting a theoretical approach that is disconnected from corporeal existence. Sociologist Nils Zurawski (1999) stresses the role of offline identity in shaping online experiences. All users have a "real" home somewhere and are rooted in real life material existence, which mediates their relationship to cyberspace (Zurawski 1999). Even if individuals have the ability to

momentarily escape the body, we presumably must return to our corporeal existences at some point. How is it possible to make sense of ourselves when "freedom" becomes synonymous with the rejection of part of that self? Theorist Kira Hall (1996) warns that neither the liberal cyberfeminist ideas of gender erasure, nor the radical cyberfeminists' separatist women-only online spaces have achieved the gender equality both are seeking. Instead, gender seems to be magnified in these text-only virtual worlds.

> Rather than neutralizing gender, the electronic medium encourages its intensification. In the absence of the physical, network users exaggerate societal notions of femininity and masculinity in an attempt to gender themselves. Gender may well be an unfortunate dichotomy, as postmodern virtual theorists argue, but cyberspace is generating goddesses and ogres, not cyborgs. (Hall 1996:167)

Drawing upon Haraway's cyborg and goddess, Hall refutes the notion that cyberspace is a budding utopia and instead makes visible its limitations in erasing gender inequality. Other researchers (Clark 1998; Burkhalter 2000; Kolko 2000; O'Brien 2000) are standing with Hall, critical of the body-erasing theories of the Internet and ready to expose the discursive reproduction of social inequalities commonly found in computer-mediated communication.

"Etching the Boundaries Deeper"—The (Re)production of Social Inequalities in Cyberspace[2]

While some theorists embrace the Internet for its revolutionary potential to disrupt traditional conceptions of gender and free us from our gendered bodies, other researchers are less convinced. In this section I will review these counter arguments which, although they vary widely in style, subject, and suggestions for the future, are linked by a shared concern for the ways that social inequalities are often masked, reproduced, and even

[2] This heading was taken from O'Brien, Jodi. 2000. "Writing in the Body: Gender (Re)Production in Online Interaction." Pp. 76-104 in *Communities in Cyberspace*, edited by M. Smith and P. Kollock. New York: Routledge.

magnified in online interactions. Instead of a landscape of friendly cyborgs, these researchers have found a mirror to the "real" world in which gender, racial, and ethnic hierarchies are alive and well.

Many of the authors who take up the reproduction of social inequalities in cyberspace cite similar reasons for their interest in the Internet (Clark 1998; Burkhalter 2000; Kolko 2000; O'Brien 2000). Because we are communicating primarily through text (although this assertion is being challenged more each day as networks are increasingly able to handle graphic, voice, and video data), this space offers us a unique opportunity to view the construction and management work that goes into our gendered, raced, and ethnic selves.

The theorists to follow draw heavily from Goffman (1959), West and Zimmerman (1987), and Judith Butler (1990), as well as from postmodern theories of fractured, multiple identities and poststructuralist notions of discursive formations. While it is not within the scope of this writing to extensively review these theoretical perspectives, it is important to acknowledge the shared history from which these theorists draw. As Grodin and Lindloff wrote in the introduction to their compilation of essays about the self navigating mediated worlds, "Personhood occurs in concert with others through conversation, and is not an autonomous project" (1996:5). I believe that all of the following theorists would concur.

Gender. While Hall (1996) examined online spaces that were intentionally and self-consciously embracing a certain feminist philosophy, Clark (1998) and O'Brien (2000) were more interested in looking at the online space that appears to exist outside of

any organizing philosophy. Through the study of teen dating chatrooms and MUDs respectively, they both seek to complicate the ways that online identity work appears to be "natural" and make visible the ways that gender and gender relations remain firmly situated in the body and offline social scripts.

One of the few theorists to study the ways that young people use the Internet, Clark (1998) draws from theories of computer-mediated communication as well as sociological work about relationships and the importance of dating in the lives of youth. Attentive to both the possibilities and limits of online cyber-dating for girls, Clark (1998) ultimately concludes that the gendered power dynamics of "real life" dating are reproduced with great veracity in teen chatrooms.

Upon cursory examination of her data collected through interviews and focus groups with high school girls, Clark found common themes of an "emancipatory promise of online dating" for girls. This promise included the potential to limit emotional pain, the ability to use verbal skills, the ability to exercise aggression within "safe" space, and the ability to construct (or reconstruct) their physical selves into more conventional ideas of beauty, thereby harnessing the power of self-presentation and authorship (Clark 1998).[3] Despite these possible sites of disruption that may have the potential to complicate the power dynamics of heterosexual relationships, Clark found that the girls (and boys) online are actually not escaping gender inequality. Girls' freedom to author

[3] Interestingly, in his study of adult dating sites, Michael Hardey (2002) found that there was less freedom to author alternative bodies. This convention appears to be self-imposed by users who view the site as a means to access offline relationships and not as an end in and of itself.

their own bodies actually becomes an exercise in the active reconstruction of their appearance to better fit traditional notions of (white, middle class) beauty (Ibid. 1998).

O'Brien was also interested in the way that gendered power relations are reinscribed in online spaces. This researcher argues that the presence of textual cross-dressing or gender-bending does not erase the gender dichotomy but instead "etches the boundaries deeper" (O'Brien 2000:87). We do not know how to behave in a gender-free environment, which leads to "hypergendering" in an effort to depict ourselves and read others within existing scripts of gender stereotypes and heterosexual desirability (Ibid. 2000). This strict adherence to gender scripts often leads to "gender policing" and harassment. When people "do gender" in online interactions, the dynamics tend to reproduce conventional notions of gender, which then reproduces gender inequality.

Race. While the research addressing gender identity and gender inequality online has become quite prolific in recent years, discussions of online racial identities have been slow to catch up. Very few sociologists have tackled questions of race on the Internet, but those who have draw from many of the same theoretical locations as online gender theorists reviewed above. Sociologists discussing racial dynamics in cyberspace are drawn to the ways that computer-mediated communication challenges notions of race as biological fixed and instead make visible the constructed nature of race (Burkhalter 2000; Kolko 2000).

In his study of postings within the Usenet groups devoted to racial and cultural issues, Burkhalter argues that racial identity is not crafted entirely by the author but is instead constructed through the *interactions* online. We can assert anything about our

racial selves that we like, but if the signs are not taken up in meaningful ways by others, the power of our authorship is limited (Burkhalter 2000). "Identity," concludes Burkhalter, "is interactionally negotiated" (2000:66). This interactional process has implications for the use of racial stereotypes in these bulletin board discussions. Racial policing and the use of racial stereotypes to judge the "true" race of the posters serves to reifies these stereotypes. "Although technology may be revolutionary and expectations utopian, newsgroups are made up of people neither revolutionary or perfect, armed with ordinary ways of understanding each other. The medium that technologically constrains participants' interactions is also constrained by participants' methods of organizing interaction" (Burkhalter 2000:73).

While Burkhalter points to the ways in which attention to race can lead to the reproduction of racial inequalities in cyberspace, Kolko's research demonstrates how online spaces work to erase race altogether. Studying MUDs (multi-user domains), Kolko questions how we come to make sense of our identities and the identities of others when racial markers are not built into these gaming spaces (Kolko 2000). While a player may choose gender (often from more than two options), few MUDs give players the space to identify racially. Instead of erasing inequality, this serves to efface difference. The erasing of racial difference in a social space that is predominately the domain of white Americans results in homogenized and compulsory whiteness online (Kolko 2000).

Ethnicity. Even more limited than race, studies of ethnicity and online ethnic inequalities are still in their infancy. The study of cyber-ethnicity seems to exist only within ethnically-coded spaces devoted to questions of culture (Poster 1998; Ignacio

2000; Warschauer 2000). Each of these writings concurs about the ways that social hierarchies not only exist but also structure interactions online. A common argument made by those attentive to ethnic inequalities calls attention to the dominance of English on the Internet. Because of the far-reaching arms of computer-mediated communication and its increasing importance at this historical moment, the prevalence of English online is "the ultimate act of intellectual colonialism" (quoted in Warschauer 2000:159).

As seen in these studies foregrounding gender, race, and ethnicity, hierarchies of inequalities are not erased or irrelevant in cyberspace. Instead they have been carried over from other social spaces and are actively reconstructed and maintained. Social scientists must therefore, be attentive to ways that social inequalities are reproduced online, and to the potential of this new social medium. As kids today are coming of age side-by-side with the Internet, their lives are increasingly tied to cyberspace. By studying their lived realities and the ways they take up computer-mediated communication, my intention is to explore the potential for disruption of these Internet hierarchies.

Each of these writings illustrates the potential of computer-mediated communication to disrupt traditional constructions of gender, race, ethnicity, and other social identities. Haraway's (1994) notion of a cyborg divorced from any biological reproductive narrative has enormous possibilities for the deconstruction of gender dichotomies (although its origins in masculinist science must not be forgotten). However, detached theoretical discussions can only go so far. The material lived realities of individuals must be examined in conjunction with constructed cyber-realities. Social scientists must find ways to make connections among online social identities and larger

questions of gender and racial inequalities, heterosexism, ethnocentrism, and power imbalances, while situating the Internet as both a site that reproduces corporeal oppressions *and* as a site that disrupts them.

"In cyberland we only drink Diet Coke"—Cyberspace and Youth Culture

When *Rent* debuted on Broadway in 1996, it offered a window into the lives of young people living in a post-Internet world. In many ways it was a scathing critique of the alienating potential of cyberlands in which kids lose connections to others while "drink[ing] Diet Coke." But how are young people actually making sense of cyberspace and the identities of themselves and others in online spaces? While much has been made of the threat adults pose to our vulnerable youth online and the dangers of media overexposure for kids[4], social researchers are only just beginning to look at the actual realities of kids' online experiences (Clark 1998; Holloway and Valentine 2003).

In this study of youth identities online, I work to be attentive to the relations of power inherent in the relationships that shape research. Throughout this research, I have considered the following questions: 1) What agency do young people have in navigating their identities on an Internet created from a specific (adult) social location? and 2) Are teen-only spaces actually offering youth access to emancipatory narratives that may offer access to power not available offline, or are they simply re-etching the adult-kid boundaries? It is clear from my examination of the literature on youth that researchers are just beginning to address these questions in the context of kids' lives.

---

[4] See Holloway and Valentine (2003) for a discussion of the "threat of cyberspace."

Still occupying a marginalized place within mainstream sociology in the United States, the study of children and youth has long been the primary domain of developmental psychologists within the social sciences. However, the field of youth sociology has been experiencing theoretical and methodological changes under the influences of feminism, symbolic interactionism, and other critical scholarship. I will trace this shift in the sociology of youth as outlined by the prominent theorists in the field and follow this with a review of the contribution of "new youth studies" to the specific topics of young people online and youth cyberculture.

Adults Studying Kids—The Paradigms of Youth Research

The current critical paradigm of new youth studies arose as *both* a response to various theories within the social sciences, such as developmental theory and functionalism, *and* from within the traditions of other work in the social sciences such as interactional approaches and postmodernism. The legacy of childhood studies within sociology lies not within the discipline but instead within developmental psychology, specifically the work of Piaget (1932, 1968). Found in any introductory psychology textbook (and many sociology texts), cognitive developmental theory relies on the notion of linear stages of development through which children learn the rules of society and interaction. Piaget's research on the cognitive development of children created what Corsaro terms a "constructivist approach" that places the child in an active role in her/his development (1992). Not simply passive sponges, instead "children interpret, organize, and use information from the environment, and acquire adult skills and knowledge in the

process" (Corsaro 1992:160). Here cognition is a social event requiring interaction and is an active process.

However, there are limits to this developmental perspective. The individual (child, adult, peer) focus this perspective posits limits the ability to see the ways in which these socializing events are connected to larger social structures and the ways in which they are part of cultural patterns (Corsaro 1992). In addition, the developmental approaches of psychologists, such as Piaget, treat childhood as a series of steps on the pathway to adulthood, always looking toward the endpoint of cognitive maturity, presumably present in adults (Corsaro 1992). This linear model relies on a view of young people as lacking, as not-yet-adults. Such an approach is unable to see what children "are," only what they are not. Corsaro writes, "...although the study of individual development (or how the child becomes an adult) is important, children and their peer culture are worthy of documentation and study in their own right. In simple terms, *kids are deserving of study as kids.*" (1997:95).

Sociologists Allison James and Alan Prout (1990) take the critique of the developmental approach one step further by exposing the domination of this theoretical perspective in all aspects of the study of children and even childhood itself. The legacy of developmental theory has been so far-reaching and is so engrained in everyday thinking about children in Western societies that it informs institutions which serve children (such as schooling) and those that study them (James and Prout 1990). In addition, "the concept of 'development' inextricably links the biological facts of immaturity, such as dependence, to the social aspects of childhood" (James and Prout

1990:10). This approach assumes a naturalness, universality, and immaturity to childhood, leaving "little theoretical space within which to explore alternatives" (James and Prout 1990:10). Not only does the perspective limit the study of children's lives, but it also reinforces and upholds the marginal status of children. In sum, each of these theorists point to limiting aspects of developmental approaches to youth studies and call for new theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of youth.

Studying Youth or Studying Youth Culture

While the study of childhood and youth has a slightly longer history, the study of youth culture began in the 1920s and 30s (Bennett 2000). Sociologist Andy Bennett summarizes three distinct stages of youth culture studies: deviance models, subculture models, and the lifestyle approach (2000). The modern study of youth culture can be traced back to early studies of youth and deviance at the Chicago School. Sociologists from the Chicago School theorized that the crime and deviance seen exhibited by young people could be attributed to a social context in which these discretions were viewed as a normal response to norms and values (Bennett 2000). Youth, in other words, create a culture in which deviance itself is normative behavior.

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), in response to the groundwork laid by the Chicago School, developed a new approach to the study of youth culture and brought about two significant changes to the field (Bennett 2000). First, sociologists at the CCCS moved away from the study of gangs and crime and moved their attention to "style-based youth cultures" (Bennett 2000:17). It was during this time that studies of music and dress became popular. The second major change brought about

by the CCCS was an approach to youth studies that utilized a subculture approach with attention to class conflict. Drawing from Marxism, these theorists pointed to class inequality as the explanation for what was now being termed "youth subcultures." It was out of these approaches to youth studies that theories of youth subcultures as resistance to mainstream culture arose (Bennett 2000). Subculture theories of youth culture are still used today to explain a variety of trends such as the punk rock scene of the 1980s and ravers of the 1990s.

One of the seminal works to arise from the Marxist approach to youth studies is Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour*. Attentive to issues of cultural capital and working class "counter-school culture," Willis (1977) examines the complex ways in which working class youth become working class adults. Arguing that their own counter-school culture is in part the primary socializing agent for their entrance into the sphere of manual labor, Willis also acknowledges the ways that this counter-school culture is also a culture of resistance to dominant class structures. Through rich ethnographic work, Willis draws heavily from the symbolic interactionist tradition to uncover the meanings that cultural and social objects have for these young men and the ways those meanings are created by the young men themselves through interaction.

The legacy of youth subculture studies can also be seen in the work of Michael Brake (1980). Like Willis (1977), Brake also draws from Marx in his analysis of the lives of working class youth, and uses the concept of youth subcultures as an analytical tool in his research. Interested in the ways that youth subcultures are negotiated in relation to dominant cultures, Brake proposes that "subcultures share elements of the

larger class culture (sometimes called the parent culture), but are also distinct from it" (1980:7). Significantly, Brake's use of subcultures serves to pluralize the concept of "youth culture," and resists the tendency to assume a singular youth experience.

However, Bennett (2000), points to a number of problems with the subculture approach developed and practiced by the CCCS. Girls' lives were often overlooked within these studies and female strategies of style-centered resistance were largely ignored (Bennett 2000). This shortcoming was addressed by female researchers such as Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1976) and later by Valerie Walkerdine (2001). McRobbie and Garber (1976) point out that even when girls' experiences are included, they often occupy positions of marginality to boys' lives.

In addition, Bennett (2000) argues the interpretations of resistance and style made by researchers failed to take into account the meanings and intentions of young people themselves (Bennett 2000). Similar to the critiques of developmental approaches to childhood studies outlined earlier, the subculture approach to youth culture may serve to reinforce the marginalized status of young people—often the very social construct against which the researchers are fighting. As a response to both the insights and the shortcomings of cognitive childhood studies and culture-based youth studies, a new paradigm for the study of youth emerged within sociology.

A New Model for the Study of Youth—The New Sociology of Childhood

While different social scientists focus on different aspects of this emerging paradigm, several common themes emerge that can be used to characterize this model. These include: 1) the category "youth" or "child" as a social construction, 2) youth

culture as worthy of study in its own right, and 3) attention to the competing forces of resistance and constraint experienced by young people. I will elaborate on each of these aspects of the new sociology of youth and offer examples from youth researchers who have been on the forefront of these theoretical shifts.

While numerous studies of youth today work with the underlying assumption that childhood is a social construction (Thorne 1995; Giroux 1996; Giroux 1997; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002; Holloway and Valentine 2003), this was not always the case. Instead the social construction of youth categories is a relatively new addition to youth scholarship, arising out of several social and sociological movements. The rise of feminism and the challenging of universal categories (such as "women") have influenced the view of the category of "child" as equally problematic (James and Prout 1990). In addition, the rise of structuralism and other linguistic approaches contributed to views of childhood, youth, and adulthood as discursive constructions (James and Prout 1990). Symbolic interactionism, and its attention to the meanings that objects have for the participants themselves, has also played a part in this theoretical shift. Instead of relying on notions of childhood as natural and universal, as is implicit in the developmental approaches, new youth scholars work under the belief that "youth is a personal, historical, and social construction that operates under many signs" (Giroux 1996:10).

The second assumption common to all theorists working under the rubric of new youth studies is the belief that youth and youth culture are worthy of study in their own right, and not simply as one step on the path to adulthood. Corsaro, whose work focuses on the peer-based culture of children through the age of about twelve, has been influential

in the shift of research on kids. His work reflects in the study of children's culture as an end in and of itself (Corsaro 1997). Having coined the term "interpretative reproduction," Corsaro demands that "the focus is on children's place and participation in cultural production and reproduction rather than on children's private internalization of adult skill and knowledge" (1997:96). Children do not simply adopt the culture, rules, and norms of the adult world around them but instead are active participants in constructing and reconstructing that culture.

In addition of sociologists of childhood, many youth sociologists are also attentive to the ways that youth cultures are undervalued and work to situate their own research within the lived experiences of young people. In her prolific body of youth scholarship on race, class, and gender, Michelle Fine is attentive to the lack of actual youth within discourse on "youth issues." For example, in her study of sex education, Fine writes, "Although the facts usually involve the adolescent female body, little has been heard from young women themselves" (1993:75). Her study then goes on to privilege the voices of young women in her analysis of the "missing discourse of desire" within school-based sex education curricula.

Nancy Lesko is also interested in the study of youth and their relationship to schooling. In her study of girls in a Catholic high school, Lesko (1988) works to give "highest priority to students' experiences in school" (p. 31). Like Corsaro (1997) and Fine (1993), she is more interested in the myths, ritual, and stories the students "create, revise, dramatize, and perform for one another. It is a dramatic creation as much as it is 'real life' with important consequences" (Lesko 1988:32). The lived experiences of teen

girls become the focus of study in and of themselves, and not simply as a window to future adulthood.

The third and arguably most significant trend to arise from the new sociology of youth is the attention given to the complex forces acting upon them and the locations they occupy. I am drawn to this new approach primarily for its ability to live within the contradictions of social life. Perhaps a function of the influence of postmodern philosophy on sociology and the emergence of other fields of critical studies, today's theorists work to manage both the acts of resistance and the sense of constraint as experienced by youth.

Cultural theorist Henry Giroux (1996, 1997) draws from the field of education by calling for a pedagogical approach to the study of youth culture. Using pedagogy as a framework for discussing popular and youth culture takes into account issues of power *and* resistance. He is interested in addressing the ways that "youth are being constructed differently within a popular culture that is both oppressive and resistant" (1996:11).

Also interested in popular youth culture, Andy Bennett (2000) calls for a "lifestyle" approach to youth studies that will allow for multiplicities within youth cultures and experiences. He too looks to account for both resistive acts and the constraint of social structure. Lifestyle theoretical models are more useful than subculture theories because "it allows for the formation of distinct social practices while at the same time acknowledging the wider set of common cultural practices within which such alternative collective strategies are played out" (2000:26). While he recognizes the "alternative" social practices of youth, he is also attentive to the institutional and

structural constraints on these practices. This "both/and" approach characteristic of postmodern theories offers a more complete picture of the lives of young people.

Sociologists James and Prout (1990) also point to this tension as the new paradigm attempts to account for both agency and structure. "It is important to recover children as social actors (and their activity as a source of social change)...We also need, however, to grasp childhood as a social institution that exists beyond the activity of any particular child or adult" (p. 28). Again this is reflective of the attempts made by this new theoretical (and methodological) orientation of youth studies to manage the complexities and multiplicities of youth cultural, social, and representational spaces.

I take up youth studies from within this new paradigm and work to be particularly attentive to the three components of the new youth studies outlined above. Influencing both my theoretical and methodological choices, I situate the category "youth" within a historical and political context, I accept and value youth culture as worthy of study in its own right (through which I also am able to relive and rewrite my own experiences as a young person), and I struggle through the complexities and contradictions that characterize the social space of youth in my own research. I feel a sense of liberation at the multiple realities allowed and encouraged to exist within this framework. I believe that the moment I realized I didn't have to choose between the positions of youth as oppressed and youth as powerfully resistant was the moment I became a sociologist. I will now turn to the literature that relies the intersections of both previous topics—the critical study of youth, computers, and the Internet.

Policing and Patrolling—The Fear of Kids Online

A striking contradiction exists in the ways that childhood and youth are defined by social institutions such as the media, politics, and schools. On one hand, children are characterized as innocent and in need of protection. During the first meeting of an undergraduate class for which I was the teaching assistant, the professor asked the students to finish the sentence "Children are..." "Innocent," "blank slates," and "the future" were popular answers, reflecting deeply ingrained ideas about the seemingly essential nature of childhood.

On the other hand, children are also defined as something to fear, particularly in this post-Columbine historical moment. While headlines and news reporters are quick to point out the rates of "juvenile crime" or the epidemic of "kids who kill," rarely do we hear about "adult crime" or the rash of "adult on adult" violence. As Jonathan Katz points out in his film *Tough Guise* (1999), the wording of these headlines and sound bites draws attention to kids while adults remain hidden behind the words. Significantly, race and gender deeply influence these competing definitions of youth. In her study of black boys in school, sociologist Ann Arnett Ferguson (2000) found that while white boys were frequently given lesser punishments on the grounds that "boys will be boys," black boys were rarely given this latitude and instead defined as future criminals to be severely punished and feared.

These seemingly contradictory definitions reflect two key fears dominant adult society has about their position of power in the adult-child relationship, and both are taken up by critical youth theorists interested in the cultural space of the Internet. In her

book *Not in Front of the Children: "Indecency," Censorship, and the Innocence of Youth*, Marjorie Heins (2002) offers a comprehensive review of legislation and commercial efforts to protect children from potential online dangers. Ranging from child predators lurking in chatrooms, to easy-access pornography, there is much to be feared online. Politicians have responded with proposed bills and other legislative efforts, while electronics companies have rushed to create new filtering and blocking software. In the meantime, parents unable to constantly monitor their kids' online activities and fearing the worst, consume these new products in the quest for safety. While more of a historical overview than a sociological analysis, Heins' work is most significant for its attention to the ways that these policing efforts not only rely on a specific set of situated values (which of course appear to be invisible), but are also explicitly linked to constructions of children as in need of protection (Heins 2002).

Focusing on the phenomenon of "moral panics" that arise in response to youth culture, John Springhall (1998) offers a historical context for the current fear surrounding computer games and "gangsta rap." Although not limited to computers or the Internet, his argument complements that of Heins by tracing the history of these panics. He argues that the forms of amusement that adults choose for children often rely on the romantic ideal of childhood, while the entertainment children choose for themselves often challenges this ideal, making adults uncomfortable (Springhall 1998). In addition, these "media panics can help to re-establish a generational status quo, that the pioneering cultural position of the young has undermined, by targeting violence or sex in teenage but not in adult forms of entertainment" (Springhall 1998:7). Not only does this fear of

computer games and the Internet reflect deeply rooted definitions of youth, but the panics that erupt in response serve to further reinforce the power imbalance between kids and adults in that they situate youth cultures as deviant in relation to adults'.

The historical analyses offered by Heins and Springhall set a critical stage for subsequent sociological studies that center on the meanings of the new Internet-based culture from the perspectives of kids themselves. I now turn to more traditional sociological studies that focus on young people and their relationship to computers.

Kids and Computers—Their Online and Offline Worlds

> Youth formations inhabit many fronts ranging across the cultures of the mall, computer bulletin boards, rock music, gangsta rap, urban basketball courts, hacker coffee shops, and an urban underground where sex is traded, drugs exchanged, politics created, and sexuality expressed. These are sites of fugitive cultures not because they are inherently oppositional, which is often not the case in the most politically progressive sense, but because they often do not conform to the imperatives of adults and mainstream culture. (Giroux 1996:11)

One of the most comprehensive studies of kids, computers, and the Internet, *Cyberkids: Children in the Information Age* addresses the important issue of the ways that identity is shaped not only through interaction with other people, but also with "things." "Children's identities and relationships are constructed not only though their relations with other people, but also through their relationships with 'things' that we share our world with, in this case, the Internet-connected PC" (Holloway and Valentine 2003:9). Utilizing research with young people at home and school, this work situates computers and the Internet within the context of everyday life. Holloway and Valentine (2003) are attentive to the ways that computer-mediated communication is used by kids

in quite sophisticated ways that may offer the possibility to complicate and renegotiate the boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

Also interested in the emancipatory promise of online spaces for teens, sociologist Lynn Shoefield Clark (1998) researched the online dating that occurs between young people in chatrooms. Drawing primarily from interviews and focus groups, this study compares the experiences of Internet dating with "real life" dating. She finds that while there appears to be the potential for greater gender and sexual freedom online (specifically the freedom to (re)define the self, the ability to use verbal skills, and the ability to assume more authorship in the construction of the relationship), more often than not traditional notions of gender roles and heteronormativity are actively reinforced.

My own research is centered within these emerging feminist, sociological and cultural paradigms of youth and youth culture online. My exploratory study examines the performance of gendered, raced, and classed identities on the Internet. Following a discussion of the methodological process that shaped this study, my analysis will show how social inequalities are both reproduced and disrupted in online spaces.

METHODS

Grounded Theory and Qualitative Methods

As young people today are growing up in a historical moment of great technological change, it is important to understand the ways that they are using these new technologies to think about themselves and others. Although a number of sociologists and social theorists have begun to study kids' use of the Internet, particularly chatrooms and bulletin boards (Turkle 1995; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002; Holloway and Valentine 2003), their specific methodologies often remained unstated. The dearth of available literature made developing my own methodology for this study relatively challenging. Drawing from traditional fieldwork methodologies (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995; Esterberg 2002), available Internet ethical research guidelines (Ess et al. 2002), and my own expedition into youth cyberculture, I have developed a methodology that attempts to address the ways that young people construct, subvert, and reconstruct identities online.

In order to understand the specific sense-making activities at work in these online spaces and the actual meanings attached to those activities by the participants themselves, I utilized an inductive research method and the philosophy of grounded theory. In contrast to the deductive research methods, which arose out of the natural sciences and the legacy of positivism, inductive research involves working from specific observations to generate theory (Esterberg 2002). Instead of beginning with a theoretical approach and a specific research hypothesis, inductive researchers begin within their data. It is the constant comparison and categorizing of data that results in the generation of social

theory (Glaser and Straus 1967). In their seminal work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss discuss the potential benefits of this "grounded" approach to social science research. "Theory based on data can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is too intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation" (1967:4). With such a direct connection to the data from which it is derived, and not the reverse, theories generated from a grounded research method are less concerned with testing or proving existing theoretical hypotheses but are instead focused on the generation of new theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also argue that theory rooted in data is less likely to be manipulated and misused, which is a risk for deductive researchers as they attempt to "fit" their data into a theory or "tack on" a theoretical explanation for their data without the proper training.

In addition to the above benefits, grounded theory, coupled with qualitative research methods, allows for a depth of knowledge and understanding not readily available with survey or questionnaire data. Emerson et al. wrote, "The ethnographer seeks a deeper *immersion* in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important" (1995:2). While specifically discussing ethnographic fieldwork, the spirit of this statement can be carried over to the larger purpose of qualitative research—to generate deep understanding of social worlds *as perceived by the participants themselves.*

It is for this reason that I have chosen qualitative research tools to investigate the ways that young people make sense of race, gender, and class within the context of youth

cyberculture. For this study I conducted approximately thirty-five hours of online fieldwork on three bulletin boards and approximately ten hours of participant observation in two chatrooms. Finally I conducted five in-depth face-to-face interviews, each lasting one to one and a half hours, which were used to situate the data within the lived experiences of young people.

Feminist Research and the Study of Young People

I have chosen each research method in an attempt to privilege the voices and narratives of young people. In discussing her research on women's identities, Catherine Kohler Riessman writes about the importance of narrative accounts. "Narratives developed during research interviews provide a window into the process. When we tell stories about events in our lives, we perform our preferred identities" (Riessman 2002:152). By collecting in-depth interview data and self-created narratives from bulletin boards, I am hoping to learn about these identity processes.

In her study of the gendered relations of schooling, sociologist Barrie Thorne (1993) was keenly aware of her adult status in the space and actively worked to develop a youth-centered research approach. Following the philosophy of critical youth studies, Thorne worked under the assumption that kids and their lives are worthy of study in their own right and at this moment, not simply as future adults. "To learn *from* children, adults have to challenge the deep assumptions that they already know what children are 'like,' both because as former children, adults have been there, and because, as adults they regard children as less complete versions of themselves" (Thorne 1993:12). It was with these potential pitfalls in mind that I designed my process of data collection.

The very choice of online research sites situates me in a position of the novice. While researchers who study schooling are likely to have memories of their own schooling experiences that they bring to the field, I had no such memories of online interaction. This is not to say that I did not enter my cyber-field with pre-existing thoughts or expectations, but I was relatively new to bulletin boards and chatrooms at the beginning of my research and I certainly had no experience with these spaces in high school.

I also worked to value youth culture and experiences despite initial feelings of triviality. As a researcher, I wanted to break away from "common adult assumptions[...]that children's daily actions are mostly trivial, worthy of notice only when they seem cute or irritating" (Thorne 1993:13). For this reason, my selection of online research sites and threads included several that I initially felt may be less important and even a bit immature. For example, I analyzed a conversation about favorite clothing stores, which I initially believed would offer little "useful" information. Not only did this conversation offer insight into the consumer aspects of youth cultures and the construction of class identities, but I was also forced to confront my own insecurities in the fact that I too, as an adult, have favorite clothing stores that reflect my middle class identity. I will now turn to a more specific discussion of my research tools and sites.

Online Fieldwork

Online bulletin boards and chatrooms both fall under the general term computer-mediated communication (CMC), along with email and instant messaging. Susan

Herring defines CMC as "communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers" (1996:1). Bulletin boards, also called message boards or forums, have been around since the early days of the Internet in the form of Usenet groups. These groups were structured around an initial posting by a single user to which other users would reply. As these additional postings build up, a thread is created. Thread refers to the strand of messages that build on each other around the initial posting. The thread then becomes a type of asynchronous conversation between many users. Under any one topic on a bulletin board, there may be hundreds of different threads, each addressing a specific subtopic. Today bulletin boards are popular interactive features on a variety of websites.

In order to establish some sort of individuality, each user is required to create an online identity at each site they post or chat. These identities are called *profiles*, and at the minimum include a screen name (sometimes called a "handle," particularly within hacking circles), but they are often more elaborate, including gender assignment, "real" names, city and country of residence, and perhaps some brief personal details. These profiles are stored on the web pages and may be accessed by any user. Screen names are used to identify each unique poster on a bulletin board.

The Sites

The bulk of the data for this research came from cyber-observations and data collection in online chatrooms and bulletin boards. Because these are public spaces, subjects were indirectly selected based on their participation on the sites of interest. I did not initiate any conversations in these spaces and did not post any initial messages or

responses on the bulletin boards being studied. In an effort to avoid artificially altering the space to more directly coincide with my research interests, I played the role of what cybercitizens call a "lurker."[5]

When deciding which sites to observe, I considered the following: the target audience of the site, the relationship of the site to offline youth culture (e.g., television shows, music), the level of traffic on the site, and my own research interests. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, I was less concerned with the sample's ability to be representative of all youth websites and more concerned with the depth of information the sites could offer this project. "In qualitative research, we are more often interested in understanding a particular case in great detail...Thus we tend to sacrifice breadth for depth" (Esterberg 2002:93). With the above criteria in mind, I selected three online research sites: MusicVid, Teen TV, and CyberGrls.[6]

The choice to use MusicVid was primarily based on its social location as a site of youth cultures. Mike Brake (1980) describes youth cultures as "interact[ing] with manufactured popular cultures and their artifacts but I would argue against manufactured cultures being deterministic in the sense that they are uninfluenced by their consumers" (p. vii). This approach to the relationship between youth cultures and popular culture is useful for all of my research sites and certainly applies to MusicVid. The site focuses on music fans in their teens and twenties and is consistently ranked the number one music

[5] For an additional discussion of lurking, please see the following section on ethical considerations.

[6] The names of these sites have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the posters.

content site with the teen demographic.[7] Firmly situated within the commercial interests of its large multi-national parent company MusicVid appears to cater to a diverse audience of young people. MusicVid expands on the programming offered on its television network through a variety of interactive activities such as the ability to download selected songs for a 30 day trial period, a "Virtual Screening Room" in which to watch current movie trailers, a "university" feature that allows interested fans to check out when MusicVid will be visiting a college campus near them, and "Community" section containing the interactive message boards.

My data collection on this site focused on several of the interactive bulletin boards offered under the "Community" section. Various bulletin boards were listed with subjects connected to music, such as the "All About Rock" and "All About R&B/Soul" boards, or the boards were tied to specific MusicVid shows. I selected threads from three of the twelve boards: "All About Hip-Hop," "All About Pop," and "Stand Up and Be Heard." I selected these boards for their potential to address identity in the form of rap or pop music (as in the case of "All About Hip-Hop" and "All About Pop"), and for the opportunity they offer for young people to talk about politics, the purpose of the "Stand Up and Be Heard" board.

Like MusicVid, Teen TV is also directly linked to an offline site of youth culture—the Teen television network. According to their website, Teen TV is America's fifth largest broadcast network and is currently the fastest-growing network among total viewers and in the 18-34 and 18-49 demographics. In addition, the network is self-

[7] To reveal the source of this information would reveal the identity of the site, thereby compromising the confidentiality of the participants.

described as "a pop-culture phenomenon and has launched the careers of dozens of young stars who make up the faces of new Hollywood." Featuring youth-centered shows, Teen TV is a cultural space that both reflects and constructs youth identities (specifically white, middle-class, youth identities as portrayed by the characters on their shows). As such, it is a cultural space rich with information about youth cultures and youth identities.

While the majority of the site is devoted to description and airtime of the shows as well as pictures and biographies of the stars, Teen TV offers a "Talk" section in which fans can talk on any of 19 bulletin boards. There are individual boards for each of the "Teen TV Originals" (shows that air only on the Teen TV network) as well as boards for "Music," and "General Discussion." I focused my data collection on "The Teen TV General" board in order to sample a broad range of discussions that may occur around any of the youth culture offerings situated within this space.

I selected CyberGrls primarily because it is a site developed from a particular feminist philosophy of girl empowerment. The site is not directly connected to consumer interests and according to the website, all content is "produced with an independent editorial voice." It should be noted, however, that as with all the other sites I studied, CyberGrls also contains advertising. According to the site, CyberGrls is "a different approach to the experience of being a teenage girl. We are committed to discussing issues that affect the lives of girls age 13 and up in a nonjudgmental, personal way." With the selection of this site, I was interested in the ways that a decidedly political site offered different (or similar) opportunities for young people to talk about issues of identity and various forms of identity construction.

From the almost fifty "Shout-Out Boards" (the site's name for bulletin boards) listed on the site, I decided to narrow my focus to the "isms" board (in which girls are encouraged to "discuss all the exquisite permutations of this suffix on this board. Tackle topics like anarchism, feminism, vegetarianism, racism and more.") and the "movies & tv" board (where girls can "read, rant and rave about the media juggernaut"). I chose these two boards in order to look at a range of ways that young people come to talk about themselves and the world around them.

Data Sampling and Collection

Data collection spanned a thirty day time period in the summer of 2004. I scheduled data collection on each site every-other day from about 5pm until about 10pm PST. Mondays and Wednesdays I collected data from Teen TV, and I collected data from MusicVid and CyberGrls on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Due to the large number of new postings each day (often numbering in the thousands), I was forced to be selective in choosing which threads I would save and use in my analysis and which I would not. I developed the following criteria for selecting threads:

1) If profiles of the users were available on the site (as they were for MusicVid and CyberGrls), I tried to select threads that were started by users 18 and under according to their profile. This guideline was not always followed if the age was unavailable (either not included in the profile or no profiles were offered) or if the thread appeared to be directly related to the research questions.

2) I selected threads that had at least ten postings but no more than 100. Threads with more than ten postings ensured that a conversation had developed that was of interest to more than a few of the visitors to the site. The upper boundary was used simply for my own convenience as copying and reformatting the postings into a useable format became quite an arduous task.

3) Perhaps the most important criteria in selecting threads was the topic. After selecting the bulletin board of interest, the threads are listed by a heading written by the originator of the thread, which is similar to the subject of an email. I selected threads based on the its apparent relevance to my research questions. I chose threads that addressed questions of race or gender or other social identities and inequalities. In addition, I selected threads that discussed specific celebrities or media, such as specific television shows or movies. (For example, I saved a thread discussing white rap artist Eminem because of his contested position within various youth cultures.)

On any given research day, I averaged about four to six threads collected for analysis. These threads were then copied directly from the bulletin board and transferred into a word processing program. They were then reformatted for ease of printing and analysis. No words were altered, however extra line spacing was eliminated and the webpage formatting was deleted. Due to the limits of my computer's capabilities, I was unable to retain the colors and graphics (such as smiley faces) when I copied the text from the online bulletin boards. Although I think that these elements may offer important insights

into online identity formation, I feel that an insightful and thorough analysis can be conducted from the text itself.

Interviews

A central part of qualitative research is in-depth interviews, which can provide invaluable subjective data directly from the individuals being researched (Esterberg 2002). Although they were not the primary source of data, in-depth interviews contextualized my findings from the online fieldwork and grounded this research project in the everyday lived realities of youth. I conducted five interviews with individuals ranging in age from 14 to 17. Attempts were made to sample individuals from different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups. Interview informants were all chosen using snowball and convenience sampling—this research is not intended for broad generalization but instead to contribute to in-depth understanding of the ways that young people express identities online (Esterberg 2002). I primarily recruited from public spaces frequented by young people such as malls, shops, and cafes. The informed consent of each interview subject as well as parental/guardian consent was obtained through the signing of consent forms prior to the interview. Interview participants were not given any financial compensation for their participation.

Interview subjects were asked to give one hour of their time, during which I asked them open-ended questions about the ways they use computers, what they do online, and other questions that arose during the course of the interview. I used few prompts and the majority of questions arose directly from issues raised by the young people in the course

of the interview in an attempt to determine how each respondent made sense of their online interactions.

Data Analysis

Following the "constant comparative" method of analysis set forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967), I made sense of the data I collected through a process of coding and memo writing. "[T]he constant comparative method is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems," (Glaser and Strauss 1967:104). Unlike quantitative data analysis, which often involves the statistical analysis of data that falls within preformed categories, this method of data analysis involves the formation of categories and meanings from the data collected.

After all of my online fieldnotes were formatted and printed and my interviews were transcribed, I was left with more than 500 typed pages of data to analyze. I systematically began the open coding process by reading through each line of data and making detailed notations in the margins. These notations would often be short descriptions of concepts or themes that were evident in the data. On a separate sheet of paper, I began to jot down some concepts that were recurring. After I had completed the open coding with all of my fieldnotes, I turned to the list of themes generated from the data and organized a list of the most common, often grouping them based on their relation to one another. I then assigned a color code to each theme.

All the fieldnotes and interviews were then recoded using a process of focused coding (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). With the color-coded themes in mind, I reread all of

my data and grouped my notes into categories by marking them with the appropriate colors. The majority of the remaining analytical work was completed during the writing process, which involved actually writing drafts of my findings and also the use of memo writing. Memos can and should be used to make sense of or clarify the data so the researcher can offer a stronger and more accurate analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I wrote short memos throughout the analysis process about themes that were particularly confusing or in an attempt to work though the possible connections between them. Excerpts from these memos often ended up in the final analysis.

It is important to make clear the analysis and theorizing involved in every aspect of qualitative research; it is not a process reserved for the discrete coding stage. Decisions are made by the researcher at every step of the process, from what to record in fieldnotes, to what to transcribe from recorded interviews, to the categories created during the coding phase (Emerson et al. 1995). Each phase of qualitative research is informed by the researcher's choice to include or exclude. At this point, I will address several important ethical considerations in doing this type of online research.

Cyber-ethics and the Politics of Lurking

When I first began this project, I searched desperately (and futilely) for some concrete guidelines about the ethics of researching kids in chatrooms and bulletin boards. As might be expected, I came up empty handed. It was in fact ethical considerations that drastically changed the shape of this research.

I originally proposed this study as an examination of online chatrooms marketed to and frequented by kids. While this proposal was approved by my university's review

board and I completed data collection from chatrooms, in the end I decided not to use that data. While I still struggle with the ethics of *all* of my online research, I was unable to reconcile the ethical violations I encountered in the chatrooms. It was primarily the ephemeral nature of chatroom interaction (in contrast with bulletin boards) that led me to set aside that aspect of my research. While bulletin boards operate with written posts that remain published to the site for weeks, months, and even years with the purpose of outside review and comment, the postings in chatrooms are much more fleeting, lasting only several screen lengths and available only to those users who are signed into the chat. Due to the frequency and quantity of new chatters, obtaining informed consent from every party in the chatroom at all times proved to be impossible. Likening data collection in a chatroom to recording a "real life" conversation without the consent of all parties involved, I felt it would be unethical to analyze the data I obtained from the two chatrooms I observed. I would like to now offer several thoughts about the specific ethical considerations of research and data collection on the bulletin boards that comprised the bulk of my data.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Since the participants who posted on the message boards during the time of my data collection were unaware that their writings were being collected and analyzed, the convention of informed consent was obviously violated. However, this violation was mitigated by several factors: first, the public nature of the research spaces and second, the publication aspects of bulletin board postings.

Anyone with access to a personal computer connected to the Internet was able to access the sites in which I conducted my fieldwork. They did not require any type of payment or registration to view the message threads. While registration was required to start a thread or reply to an existing thread, it was not required to "lurk" on the sites. *Lurking* refers to the process of visiting sites and reading the information there without participating (www.dictionary.com). It is a common practice used by web surfers and "despite real-life connotations to the opposite, [lurking] is an online practice which is ethical and sometimes wise" (Mann and Stewart 2000:14). In fact, "real-life" lurking is a research strategy adopted by many qualitative sociologists in public spaces with little concern for ethical violations. By adopting the role of the lurker I was able to ethically maintain my research goals without having to misrepresent myself.

In addition to the public nature of my research sites, the act of authorship and publication that accompanies these bulletin board postings influenced my choice to use the message boards as a source of data. Implicit in and central to the concept of publication is the complimentary concept of viewing. Unlike a personal diary or private correspondence, messages in a forum are authored, entered, and posted with the intention of being read and eliciting responses. While this does not directly constitute consent for research or participation, it does make the analysis of their contents less ethically ambiguous. Just as researchers may analyze newspaper or magazine articles, I have chosen to collect and analyze online publications. However, in order to more fully protect each participant, the detailed guidelines of confidentiality and anonymity have been followed.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

My research sits somewhere in between these two ethical conventions. While screen names provide a certain degree of anonymity since I am unable to trace the online identity to a "real life" person, many cyber-citizens invest a great deal into their online identities (Turkle 1995). For this reason, all screen names were changed in the final write-up of my research in an effort to ensure complete confidentiality for all participants. Keys that connect actual screen names to my invented aliases are stored separately from the collected data. In addition, the names and web addresses of the three research sites were changed. It would be very difficult to connect the postings cited in my writings back to a specific poster on a specific site as these identifying details have been omitted.

I have worked to come to ethical terms with my research, and I believe that I have fulfilled the ethical guidelines set forth by my discipline to the best of my ability. I do feel, however, that there is still space to question or consider the relations of power inherent in this research. I work to be aware of my role as a researcher in every step of the process and the amount of control I have in relation to my research subjects. In thinking through the ethical considerations of her own research on kids, Barrie Thorne wrote, "I wanted to observe and document their more autonomous collective moments. But in the very act of documenting their autonomy, I undermined it, for my gaze remained, at its core and in its ultimate knowing purpose, that of a more powerful adult" (1993:27). I too struggle with a deep desire to uncover moments of agency and resistance in these online spaces while also knowing that my very act of researching and writing about those subversive moments diminishes their power. It is my hope that the

contribution of this and other research projects on the lived experiences of young people will counteract the undermining that occurs in the research process. I will now turn to my findings for a more in depth discussion of that agency as well as moments of constraint.

FINDINGS

Introduction

When I began thinking about this project almost two years ago, I never imagined the complex and varied ways that young people would perform racial, gender, and class identities in online spaces. Though I suspected these anonymous and accessible sites might offer important information about the variety of ways that technology is used by young people, I could not have guessed the ways that social identity work would manifest online. In the early stages of my research, many people asked me how I would begin to study race, class, and gender online due to their presumed invisibility. As I learned almost as soon as I signed online, race, gender, class and sexuality were far from invisible on the sites I selected. I also quickly discovered that social inequality is alive and well in cyberspace, but in those same spaces there were also powerful moments of disruption. In the sections that follow I show 1) how young people perform gender, race and class, 2) the ways that border patrolling and silencing serve to uphold social inequalities, and 3) how young people work to challenge and disrupt notions of gender, race, and class.

It is important to offer a definition of several key concepts examined in this project, namely race and gender. Although both terms are frequently used in everyday conversation and in sociological analysis, the meanings of race and gender may take on numerous connotations and are often largely dependent on context. For the purpose of this research, I am concerned with race as a *social construction*, imbued with particular political, social, and cultural meanings, which serves to organize people according to

socially defined characteristics. The self-identified racial location of posters is included in my analysis when available.

Gender is also defined as a social concept, referring to the constructions of masculinity and femininity and may or may not coincide with physiological sex. Sex refers to the biological condition of being male or female, while gender refers to the socially constructed differences between men and women, boys and girls (Oakley 1972). As with race, gender information about subjects was included when available through interview data, website profiles, or self-reporting in the course of online conversations.

Who's Who Online? The Performance of Racial, Gender and Classed Identities

While the lack of physical bodies in Internet spaces does necessitate new ways of thinking about race online, racial identity was in no way absent from the youth-centered bulletin boards I studied. In fact, many users actively claimed a particular racial identity, often directly stating, "I'm black" or "I'm white." It is important to note that these admissions were recorded much more frequently in the threads that specifically addressed race or racism, or on message boards that were devoted to political issues (such as MusicVid's "Stand Up and Be Heard" board). For example, during a discussion of interracial dating on the CyberGrls site, two of the six posters self-identified a racial location, but during a thread questioning the talents of "tween queen" Hillary Duff on the same site, not one of the posters made any statement about their own racial identity. That is not to say that race was not relevant to this thread. Both race and gender played a central role in the discussion but remained invisible, as whiteness often does.

Not all moments of racial identification are so direct. Screen names can also point to a particular racial and/or gendered location. For example, names such as *chocogal*, *VanillaBabe*, *Latinagrz*, and *Proud2bBlack*[8] suggest particular racial and gender identities. These screen names are chosen by each user based on personal preference and availability. Each name can only be used once on a site, and they contribute to the individual identity of each poster. They also serve to construct race as a real and meaningful force in online interactions.

It appears that posters often employ these racial identities in an effort to situate their particular position in an online debate. These admissions are related to the ways that race is conceptualized in the United States and who is allowed to talk about race. Several white users preface their online comments with their race, as if to qualify their statements. Consider the following example:

> In response to the question "Am I racist" posted by a bi-racial 13 year-old girl: "This isn't really my turf, since I'm white, but If you really think that you have a problem, mabey you should leard more about your people and their acheivements." (CyberGrls 6/22/04)[9]

In this comment, the poster position whiteness as the absence of race, and as such position themself as race-less and less equipped to discuss issues of race and racism. The socially constructed definition of whiteness as "the absence of race" may lead young people to feel unable or unqualified to discuss their own racial location in critical ways, and more generally, issues of race, racism, and white privilege. At the same time, it is

---

[8] All screen names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the informants. Pseudonyms have been chosen whenever possible to reflect the meaning and intention of the original name.

[9] Postings have been recorded exactly as they appeared on the site at the time of collection. I have not edited any of the spelling, punctuation, or capitalization.

this very invisibility of whiteness that privileges their voices over those belonging to kids of color.

This finding confirms the results of an extensive study conducted by Pamela Perry (2002) on the ways that white high school students come to think about racial identity and culture, particularly in the context of schooling. Through participant observation and interviews with white students at two high schools, Perry found that the students at the school with a primarily white population were unable to define white culture or find ways to talk about whiteness. "With little to put white culture in relief such that whites could see it and name it, white youth at Valley Groves could not define white culture and fell into a cognitive gap when asked" (Perry 2002:97).

Despite this finding, some white posters were able to assert authority on race and racial issues as seen in the following example:

> When starting a thread about racial inequality, a white 15-year-old writes:
> "i maybe white but i do have a mind people come in all different colorz it doesn't i just don't know y some ppl have 2 bring ^ REALLY OLD subjects i mean its done and over with" (MusicVid 6/17/04)

While little attempt is being made here to talk across racial difference and acknowledge white privilege, this poster feels entitled to speak on the subject, unlike the earlier example. Notice the use of the first person to claim authority despite the fact that the poster "maybe white." This sits in contrast to the above example in which the white poster surrenders any authority with the phrase "This isn't really my turf, since I'm white."

Just as whiteness gets constructed as lacking racial identity, blackness becomes the ultimate raced identity, and is used to strengthen a variety of opinions held by black

users. During the time of my data collection in the summer of 2004, comedians Shawn and Marlon Wayans released the movie *White Chicks,* about two black male FBI officers who go undercover as white women. A thread on the MusicVid site discussing the movie elicited a heated debate about the nature of racism. The following post comes from a 16-year-old black girl in response to *RuralChrist*:

> no,no,no rural—I said whites—not Americans. Whites are not the only americans, got it? And I believe that it true b/c its in their blood. All those years of haterd isnt completely out yet in MOST not ALL. I have very close white friends and many enemies. Im black—I know this b/c I experience it ALL THE TIME. (MusicVid 6/22/04)

In the same thread another poster writes:

> Get the hell outta here u know damn well if 2 white guys made a movie called black chicks yall'd be ready for war. p.s im black (MusicVid 6/22/04)

Here the users expect that the personal experience of blackness and a black identity will be weighted differently than the arguments made by previous (white) posters. The all too common framing of racism in the United States as solely an individual affliction rather than a systemic social problem leads to the over-valuing of personal experience and actions when discussing racial inequality. Sociologist David Wellman (1993) points to the ways that the personalizing of racism and the reduction of racism to individual prejudice serves to hide the social advantages that come with particular racial locations. This is not to say that personal experiences of racism are not valid but simply to make visible the limits that language places on the ways that young people (and adults) talk about race and racism.

The Complexities of Identity

While these bulletin boards are firmly situated within the commercial interests of their market-driven creators (particularly in the case of MusicVid and Teen TV), they

also became a space for young people to work through issues of identity and inequality. I was privy to complex and creative discussions of sexism, feminism, racism, politics, and popular culture when observing in these bulleting boards, the likes of which I have never seen during my time working in other youth-centered spaces, particularly schools. As I collected and analyzed my data, it became clear that many of these young people were struggling against the language and concepts currently available for talking about complex issues of racial, gender, and class identities. In a social space that relies primarily on text and language, discursive limitations become increasingly visible.

"I Don't Know the Right Word for it"
The Limits of Language when Talking about Race

Several exchanges served to illustrate the ways in which the language that is commonly used to talk about racism and racial inequality is inadequate to address the complexities of race relations in the United States at this historical moment. Several users appear frustrated that their racial location does not fit neatly into the four racial categories recognized in the United States (white, Hispanic, black, and Asian). Consider the following post:

> im not sure if u can consider me white or not (everyone seems to have their own opinion of me these days) (MusicVid 6/22/04)

This statement points to the constructed nature of race, both online and off, and the ways in which we reify the racial identity of ourselves and others. This relational position, demonstrated by "everyone seems to have their own opinion of me," appears to be an attempt by this poster to work through definitions of self. There is a struggle here to be self-defining in the face of institutional racial categories

In response to the question of which rapper is better, Nas or Eminem, another poster writes:

> Im half white half black and i dont like either one. I am more partial towards Jurrasic 5, Sugar Hill Gang, and Digital Underground (MusicVid 6/22/04)

In this example, the writer works to claim a bi-racial identity within a social context that only allows for whiteness or blackness, thereby complicating mutually exclusive categories of race. When creating a profile on these sites (and other social spaces), the physical room allotted for "race" and the question itself ("What race are you?") implies a singular response. Similarly, forms that require the selection of a singular race from a predetermined list of responses contributes to the limited ways that race can be claimed and expressed.

Notions of "reverse racism" are directly connected to the individualized approach taken to explain racial inequality, reflecting the limited and limiting conceptualizations of racism. Claims of reverse racism appear over and over on these boards. Unprepared with alternative ways of talking about race, young people in these online spaces are repeating and reconstructing adult arguments of racism and racial inequality which ignore the power relations that shape everyday lives. Consider the following examples from a thread titled "White Bitches":

> Why do some people assume that all white girls wear hollister, are preppy, and are complete bitches? Well i'm none of those things and it freaks me out...in fact i have been called a white bitch and presonally i see it as racism and completely unfair. (CyberGrls 6/24/04)

> its absolutely true. just because you happed to be part of the majority race in your country doesn't mean that any hatred towards you is acceptable, or any less racist. (CyberGrls 6/24/04)

When relations of power are not a part of everyday discussions and remain highly invisible and protected by the ruling class (D. Smith 1987), concepts such as reverse racism become logical. These girls are trying to work through issues of race here but are

ill-prepared to make sense of their frustration in empowering ways. The concept of "white bitches" carries as many gendered implications as it does race, but the sexist connotation of the word "bitch" is never discussed in this thread. It seems that the anger these white girls have over this term might be at least partially attributable to gender inequality, but their social and cultural power lies in their whiteness. For that reason, they seem to find greater support arguing reverse racism rather than calling attention to gender inequality.

Patrolling the Borders—Managing Gender and Sexuality

The border patrolling that occurs in these spaces mirrors the offline interactions found by other researchers (Fine and Macpherson 1992; Brown 2003). The concept of borderwork can also be a useful tool for understanding the ways that young people recreate gender and sexuality as organizing forces in these online spaces. Thorne describes borderwork as the process through which hegemonic notions of gender are "acted out, reinforced, and evoked" (1993:86).

While borderwork is enacted by both sexes, it is frequently the girls on these sites policing other girls in order to align themselves with idealized femininity. As theorized by Lyn Mikel Brown (2003), by distancing themselves from the "other," girls are able to (temporarily) avoid attacks directed at them. Brown terms this "girlfighting" and points to its roots in Paulo Freire's concept of horizontal violence: "[Girls] internalize or appropriate cultural messages about what it means to be a "good" girl—messages that have great power and thus invite constant comparison and competition—and take out their own failure to meet these ideals on other girls because they don't have the power to

take them out on others" (Brown 2003:90). Related to the concept of internalized oppression, horizontal violence is most often a feature of disempowered groups who are unable to direct their frustration toward the sources of their oppression. This serves to make invisible the actual imbalance of power at work by feeding into widespread ideas about the essential nature of girls as catty, petty, and bitchy (Brown 2003).

Attacks between girls on these boards do not simply put down the individual poster but in the process of pointing out the other's "indiscretion," certain girls are able to align themselves with more powerful posters (the boys). Consider the following examples from a thread titled "What's wrong with buying 50.00 shampoo & conditioner?":

> What's your response?-you say?
> SHUT-UP BITCH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
> AND DONATE TO YOUR LOCAL CHILDRENS CANCER FOUNDATION
> (16-year-old female on MusicVid 6/17/04)

> seriously 50 bucks?? i never heard of such a thing in my life. I spent like 4 bucks at the most and buy like pantene pro v two in one or garnier fructis two in onelol i used to just buy suave and s!#% for 99 cents when i was in college and it really all works the same. My shampoo and conditioner works just fine for me and i've only gotten compliments on my hair. But i agree that its your money and you can do what you want but you also can't ask a question and not expect some negativity...im sure when you grow up you'll get your priorities in order. (19-year-old female on MusicVid 6/17/04)

These two posts offer differing examples of the horizontal violence that serves to patrol the gender border. The use of "bitch" in the first post and the all capital letters (the text version of screaming) connote a more direct and open attack on the original poster. In contrast, the second example offers a more subtle age attack ("im sure when you grow up you'll get your priorities in order") and leverages social age inequalities to criticize the original poster. Despite their different logics, both posts not only point to the indiscretion

committed by the original poster, but also place the respondents far from that indiscretion.

The Skank and the Slut—Policing Female Sexuality

While this border patrolling can be directed at other female posters, young female celebrities such as Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, Christina Aguilera, and Britney Spears also become the "other" girl. One of the most powerful examples of this girlfighting appeared on a message board devoted to pop music in a thread asking the question, "Does Duff have SkANK potential?" Referring to actor and singer Hilary Duff, who rose to fame on the Disney Channel show *Lizzie McGuire*, this thread raises issues of sexuality, gender, and the role of language in girlfighting.

Border patrolling begins with the topic line of this thread ("Does Duff have SkANK potential. "Skank," like the related slurs "whore," "slut," "bitch," and the abbreviated "ho," are all gendered assessments that are used by men and women, boys and girls alike to police female sexuality. However, when used by women against other women, the terms function as forms of horizontal violence, used as a way to patrol the border between "us" and "them." By calling out the promiscuity of "other" girls (whether real, assumed, imagined, or predicted), the female posters here are able to distance themselves from similar judgements. In addition, by aligning themselves with the boys on this thread, they are able to access power through association (Brown 2003).

Although it is impossible to "know" the gender of any of the posters on this thread unless explicitly stated, several appear to claim female gender identity through the use of gendered screen names, such as *dadiesltlgrl* and *nellysflower*. Each of these

posters work to distance themselves from potential contamination by attempting to prove Hilary Duff's "skank" status. For example, *dadiesltlgrl* writes:

> I am actually starting to think [that Duff has skank potential]...I didn't' used to but now that she's dating a 25 year old I don't know..,It seems kinda like a skanky thing to me. i mean, come on, Joel Madden is NINE years older than her....That's like half her life! (MusicVid 7/1/04)

In this posting, dating someone older is enough to taint her "good-girl" image. Here cultural ideas of the sexual innocence of white girlhood are employed to sanction Duff (and perhaps Duff fans as well). By pointing out Duff's apparent indiscretion, which is directly tied to her location as a 16-year-old white teen, *dadiesltlgrl* works to separate herself from the "skank" label. Later in the same thread, *nellysflower* posts:

> Well there are those who go astray. Look at Britney. She was a Mousketeer in the early 90's. I used to watch her when I was like 9 years old and I'm 19 now, going on 20 in two months. hee hee Christina was doing something else She was doing the same thing and they became best friends and eventually popstar rivals later on in life. (MusicVid 7/1/04)

Here *nellysflower* evokes the image of other popular young celebrities, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera who have already been coded in particular ways. Both women are simultaneously maligned for their overt sexuality and rewarded with commercial success as they balance the impossible Madonna/whore dichotomy. Like *dadiesltlgrl,* this poster patrols the gender borderlands by contrasting a Mousketeer past (implying a Disney-esque innocence) with the Christina and Britney of today who have gone "astray." The process of pointing out the gendered indiscretion serves to both reinforce sexual gender inequalities as well as distance herself and secure a safer space far from those "other" girls.

Occasionally, a poster works to disrupt this policing by calling attention to the act itself. When starting a thread entitled "girl vs. the world...it doesn't have to be that way," *howser* writes:

> females: have u noticed that in almost everything u do males seem to gang up an say ur wrong or sometimes females do it too. ex=if u have sex wit ur partner u are called a slut even if its ur 1st time..an if u don't ur a freezer an a tease.. (MusicVid 7/7/04)

By pointing out that "sometimes females do it too," *howser* serves to make visible the border patrolling at work. She notes that by calling attention to the "sluttiness" of other girls, the "females" are able to distance themselves from this deviance and access the (limited) power associated with "appropriate" sexuality.

Significantly, attempts are made later in the thread to silence *howser* with a criticism of her cyber shorthand:

> sexism seems to be a problem, alas I cannot read your post on the issue because your spelling is horrendous. your point might be taken more seriously if you took the time to spell thing out fully. u, ur, wit. these are not words. (MusicVid 7/7/04)

While this rebuke does not stop the discussion, other posters do work to distance themselves from *howser*'s disruption. By individualizing sexism, these other posters eliminate any possibility of expressing an alignment with feminism, which is framed in opposition to idealized femininity. Consider the following examples from the same thread:

> I'm going to betray my own gender here. Personally, I don't think that the world is against women. Women are against the world. We whine, complain, gripe, scream, yell and make excuses for our shortcomings. Rather than stand up and make a difference, we complain that we are unfairly labeled a slut or that we are unfairly excluded form male dominated sports. Bullsh*t.
>
> Women need to stop whining, complaining about being walked on, and worring about how they look 24/7 (stereotyping here sorry) and take a stand. Ok I'm done ranting now.

Each of these users (both female) criticizes those girls who call attention to sexism and reduce their arguments to "whining" and "complaining." This type of individualizing gender inequality, and silence around institutional forms of sexism, serves to make invisible the power relations and work, while simultaneously reconstructing those relations.

"straights aren't SUPPOSED to understand gays"—Patrolling the Gay/Straight Borderlands

The topic of gay marriage was at the forefront of the news during the spring and summer of my data collection. While President Bush proposed a constitutional amendment explicitly defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, the newly elected mayor of San Francisco Gavin Newsom declared gay marriage legal in the city and married 4,161 couples before the California State Supreme Court ordered a halt to the issuance of marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples (Kravets 2004). Although I only collected data from one thread devoted to the topic, there were many to choose from, as evidenced by this statement from *lumpydumpty*, "next time just bump one of the other 12,700 gay marriage posts!" (MusicVid 6/24/04).[10] Pointing to the prevalence of other threads on this topic, *lumpydumpty* advocated the bumping of an earlier, presumably identical, post.

The thread I pulled dealing with this topic became a site where the borders of sexuality were firmly delineated and situating the self (often on the "absolutely straight" side) became a task central to the discussion. Consider the following posts:

[10] Bumping is a technique that relies on the chronological reorganization of threads to increase or maintain the visibility of certain topics. Because the threads are listed in the order of most recent post, with the threads with the newest post listed at the top of the page, by adding a new entry to an older thread (these new entries often just contain the word "bump") that thread is "bumped" to the top of the page.

> What do you guys think? I think it should be legal. People too often think of gay people as "gay" people and not just "people". Who are we to judge the way that someone else loves someone else? Sure, the bible says it's wrong, but the bible also promotes slavery. I live with gay people as to me there is nothing more sickening, ignorant or immature then someone saying "f!#%&*" or "lesbo" i can't stand it.
>
> I know it's redundant but they are people too you know. They have right to love whoever they please. Don't we as straight people?
>
> who is to say that two men or two women can't be destined for one another? if it's a serious, committed relationship between two people, they've already got something over most HETEROSEXUAL relationships in america today. so what do we base our negative judgement on? the fact that WE consider it disgusting? well, in all actuality, homosexuals think heterosexuality is disgusting too. straights aren't SUPPOSED to understand gays, in that sense. that's the whole concept of it.
>
> (MusicVid 6/24/04)

Although each of these posters is arguing the seemingly inclusive perspective of marriage for all, by actively situating themselves as the straight "us" and "we" (simultaneously assuming heterosexuality for the readers as well), they effectively push the queer "them" to the periphery. This serves to reify the binary notions of sexuality, thereby recreating the power imbalance.

It is important to note that not all posters worked to distance themselves from the potential stigma of queerness. Several users on these boards have directly claimed queer identities, and Internet spaces have been considered one of the safest and most accessible sites of community for gay youth. One user on the TeenTV site describes himself as hailing from "over the big gay rainbow" and several users on the CyberGrls message boards claimed a lesbian or bisexual identity.

Individualizing Inequality and the Silencing of Structural Critiques

"Am I Racist?"—Racism as a Function of the Individual

As mentioned earlier, racism is frequently framed as an individual problem. The press covers horror stories about racist cops and violent hate crimes, attributing them to

racism (Lee 2004), while at the same time reporting the dangers of Africanized bees (Auther 1999) and "urban" youth. This prolific type of news coverage, as well as national policies on race and affirmative action, and the general tenor of individualism that permeates the rhetoric of United States citizenship, all inform the ways that race is talked about. This individualized racism can be seen throughout the online discussions I observed.

The opening of the movie *White Chicks* brought about discussions of the nature of racism, blackness, gender, and reverse racism. The "Stand Up and Be Heard" board on MusicVid became one site of these discussions, during which racism was frequently framed as an individual flaw. Consider the following postings:

> it's serious when you make outlandish claims that MOST Americans are out to hurt black people. (MusicVid 6/22/04)
>
> Well, I live in GA...Atlanta to be specific...I've encountered my fair share of racism. But it shouldn't spoil your view of "all white people"...you know what I mean? Some people are just idiots and can't help themselves. (MusicVid 6/22/04)
>
> PEOPLE WHO GET THEIR PANTIES IN A BUNCH OVER STEREOTYPICAL MOVIES NEED TO GET OVER IT!!!!!...BOTTOM LINE COMEDY AND MOVIES LIKE THIS ARE FOR FUN, THEY'RE NOT MADE TO OFFEND, PEOPLE JUST TAKE IT THE WRONG WAY. (MusicVid 6/22/04)

The first two examples work to dispute claims of systemic and institutional racism through the individualizing of racism as seen with the phrases "MOST Americans" and spoiling "your view of 'all white people.'" Discussions of racism are transformed into discussion of personal prejudice. The last excerpts not only point to the ways that racism is individualized, but also the ways that the response should be one of individual acceptance as well. The framing of movies as entertainment and just "for fun" absolves

certain cultural institutions from any responsibility for racism and shifts the blame to the subordinated group.

This privatizing of racism was not exclusive to this thread. It was a common way to frame discussions of racial inequality in almost every thread that addressed the subject. During a series of posts about the race of criminality, a white female user argued that more blacks commit crimes than whites:

> No i dont get my facts from the news. I SEE the facts everyday. I work in a prison, so I do know the facts and the statistics crimes. I am also a part time police officer(my husband is full time)so I also know and see the FACTS every day. If you people knew how to comprehend what you read you would know what i said. (MusicVid 6/17/04)

As discussed earlier, not only is the unequal proportion of black men in prison explained in terms of individual criminality and not in terms of the well-documented racism within the judicial system itself, but the individual experience of this poster becomes a factual account of this criminality. In the same thread, another white poster writes:

> I wanna help...My sister just did a research report on the over crowded jails we have in this area. According to her research, the majority of the men in jail are black but the majority of the women are white. They gave her a head count of exactly how many of each, black man and white man, and black women and white women, but I can't remember the numbers. There was one minority that she didn't even include in her report, the mexicans. Most were being held for INS. *It just seems that all around the country, the majority of male prisoners are black. These are just the facts people, they don't mean anyone is racist. It just means that there are a lot of black folks out there doing illegal things.* (emphasis added; MusicVid 6/17/04)

By stating, "there are a lot of black folks out there doing illegal things," this poster disputes a structural analysis of why black men are over-represented in prisons in favor of a theory of individual pathology. This post relies on a false belief in the innate fairness of the criminal justice system. Instead of looking at the criminal justice system, the prison system, or the method of statistical reporting, this individualized approach to racism prevails among users. Despite this powerful online majority, some of the young users are

attempting to argue for an approach to racial inequality that accounts for relations of power and institutional access.

"Why I choose to struggle and work for things myself"—The Silencing of a Structural Analysis

On the message boards that I observed, debate seemed to be one of the primary purposes of these spaces. Whether specifically devoted to political issues, inequality, or popular youth culture, every board had strong elements of argument, persuasion, and the formation of alliances. The alliances frequently functioned to silence dissenting voices. The few users attempting to ask and answer broader questions about the nature of racism and the institutionalized aspects of inequality, were often silenced by other users and struggled against prevailing notions of race that inform discussions of racism, both online and off.

The thread discussed above addressing the crime rates of whites and blacks offered an example of the struggle faced by users attempting to offer a more systemic approach to racial inequality. After one poster argued that more blacks commit crimes because there are more black men in jail, the following exchange closed out the thread:

> **Latinagrz:** because the police presents is concentrated mostly in black neighborhoods. whites commit just as much if not more crime use more drugs and get off easier.
>
> **dramaqueen:** Latinagrz is right did you know that a lot of drug dealings now happen in the white suburbs? It's because the adverage "income" (excuse me allowance) of a surbanite teen is $100 a week...won't see that much in the projects
>
> **VanillaBabe:** $100 a week...No one I knew as a teen got that much.
>
> **sammy581:** Hey! I'm Mexican but I have to say that I love every race! ITs so cool to see other cultures and their way of life.
>
> **69ways:** $100 a week? Damn you just about floored me on that one. That's just crazy. I got an allowance up until I moved out at 18 last year. It was only 20 bucks a week though. I also worked from the age of 14 though. Just to add a side note here...my

> parents are and always have been wealthy. They just took the time to instill a good work ethic and a need for education in me. Which is why I didn't take the handouts they have and choose to struggle and work for things myself. (MusicVid 6/18/04)

This exchange illustrates the ways that more critical examinations of racial inequality come to be criticized and replaced on these boards with personal narratives on the values of individualism and the ever-popular work ethic rhetoric. While *Latinagrz* points to institutional issues that may affect arrest rates (the concentration of police in black neighborhoods) and *dramaqueen* offers support with a discussion of the suburban white drug trade, *69ways* reframes the discussion with the longest response. This final poster simultaneously individualizes the discussion by offering personal experience as evidence and perhaps implies that fewer black men would be in prison if they had "a good work ethic" and "didn't take the handouts." This appears to reflect the ideologies that serve to inform racial policy and practice in the United States more generally.

One of the most powerful examples of silencing that occurred during my observations, appeared during the discussion of *White Chicks*. In this thread, *Proud2bBlack* attempts to argue for an examination of racism that accounts for relations of power. One user is arguing that if a movie called *Black Chicks* had been made by a white cast and crew, there would be an outrage similar to the one accompanying the release of *White Chicks*. *Proud2bBlack* responds with,

> I know people would get mad at whites, because most white people do things to hurt blacks and other races. Thats when it gets serious. And...there's the difference, see? (MusicVid 6/22/04)

This comment is followed several posts later with the entry in which *Proud2bBlack* argues that racism has a historical context, "And I believe that is true b/c its in their blood. All those years of haterd isnt completely out yet..." (MusicVid 6/22/04). Several

posters strongly refute this statement, and despite corrections made by *Proud2bBlack* later, the other users continue the written attacks and *Proud* eventually leaves the discussion. Consider the following excerpt from this thread:[11]

> **RuralChrist:** Wow, you just keep it going don't you...now you are saying that hate is genetic or something? I was completely unaware of a hate gene or that there was some underlyiung difference between the DNA of black people and the DNA of white people that makes white people want to hate and harm black people. I guess I have a thing or two to learn about science and biology. Thanks for clearing that up...Question though. If a black person got a blood transfusion from a white person, would the black person now have the desire to hate black people???
>
> **Proud2bBlack:** right now your proving that you dont like blacks, rural. but I dont really care. Um...do you actually think hate can be in blood?? Ok, I should have said something like...family?? I dont know the right word for it. You need to act your age and dtop trying to pick a fight with me.
>
> **Maya0726:** Everybody calm down...in case you didn't notice Proud2bBlack is a 16 year old kid...I would hardly think his views of white people at this age are definitive of what he will be like when he's older. And Proud...Rural DOES NOT dislike black people...he's one of the coolest and nicest posters on this board...he's just trying to explain to you that the "hate in their blood" theory is very wrong and offensive...that's all.
>
> **Proud2bBlack:** OMG!!! You guys are all crazy. There you go again...proving my point. You're trying to get back at me for saying "its in your blood" Maybe it is and you dont realize it. Or maybe it was a lucky guess...since I didnt litterly mean it. look i'll finish talking to you guys later. I gotta do more important stuff.
>
> **RuralChrist:** LOL...nice debating with you kiddo!

In this example, *Proud2bBlack* attempts to recontextualize the debate by locating racism within a historical context, but the other posters ridicule this position. *RuralChrist* intentionally "flames" *Proud* throughout this exchange, even after she has decided to leave the discussion. According to dictionary.com, flaming is "an insulting criticism or remark meant to incite anger, as on a computer network." Comments such as the sarcastic question about the blood transfusion and the use of "kiddo" in the final line are considered flames. In this case, the flaming has served to silence this alternative, black

[11] Several postings that fell between those shown here which were unrelated to this exchange have been excluded for continuity.

voice, leaving the individualized conceptions of racism to continue unchallenged for the remainder of the thread.

Feminism, Sexism, and the Individual—The Struggle to Make Sense of Gender Inequality

While feminism is certainly a source of contention and argument in these online message boards, these same spaces also seem to be sites where young people can work through the cultural space of feminism and the role of feminism in their own lives. Many of the youth posting on these sites are actively resisting feminism and feminist identities while others strongly claim ownership of a the label "feminist."

In her article "A Tale of Two Feminisms," Carolyn Sorisio (1997) critiques the co-opting of the "language of victimization" by such "postfeminists" as Katie Roiphe and Camille Paglia. She writes that "critiques of 'victim feminism' appeal to the myth of rugged individualism, the belief that anyone can overcome obstacles and succeed in American society. Pouring historically exploited groups into one victimization mold enables some Americans to disclaim any debt we may have as citizens who greatly benefit from gender, class, and race inequality. It obscures the true dynamics of power and absolves responsibility" (1997:141). The young men and women on these sites both use "critiques of victim feminism" and work to individualize sexism as they struggle to make sense of the political and personal space of feminism.

Even girls who claim a feminist identity participated in borderwork as discussed above, although it took a slightly different form. Instead of distancing themselves from girls who are assigned an overly sexual character, feminist girls work to police the

borders between themselves and "unliberated" girls. Consider the following posting from a feminism board at CyberGrls:

> Ok feminists—who shaves their legs? I DON'T! I feel so cool wearing a skirt and seeing the reactions of girls who think femenism is crap and who are all prbably gunna grow up to mary some boring business man and live in the suburbs and never again voice their opinion because it might upset their husband or because"the nighbours will talk". I feel liberated. (CyberGrls 7/8/04)

While this posting may initially disrupt notions of idealized femininity, its results are no different from other forms of border patrolling. Unfortunately, this distancing from other girls who are "gunna grow up to mary some boring business man and live in the suburbs" still serves to separate girls from avenues of power that may be more accessible through alliances. By creating divisions, aggression becomes misplaced onto each other (who ever the "other" is), rather than onto the source of girls' oppression. This division then serves to uphold power inequalities (Brown 2003).

Heteronormativity, a term coined by queer theorist Michael Warner (1999), is a common feature of these boards, and becomes a way for the borders between "us" and "them" to be further delineated and reinforced. This was particularly evident during these discussions of feminism when the fear of lesbianism played a significant role. *Heteronormativity* refers to the practice of organizing patterns of thought and beliefs around the presumption of universal heterosexual desire, behavior, and identity (Warner 1999). After recounting a story of two passionate girlfriends sanctioned by a third friend who alerted others that they might be lesbians in her book *Girlfigting* Brown wrote:

> This story shows not only how girls' expressions of closeness and intimacy with girlfriends are hampered by strict codes of sexual and gender 'normalcy,' but how girls

> benefit socially by policing or separating from transgressors and reporting their behavior to other girls. (Brown 2003:142)

The girl who fits into the mold created by idealized femininity is not only white, middle-class, slim, and tall, but she is also straight. Many girls in these online spaces work hard to separate themselves from any possible association with lesbianism.

This separation was seen most clearly during discussions of feminism that arose on all three sites I observed. There seemed to be a fear that this topic in particular might induce sanctioning, pointing to the rich history between the mainstream feminist movement and the "lavender menace" (B. Smith 1993). The fear of association with queer sexualities still carries such power that references to "other" types of feminism were prolific. Consider the following excerpts from discussions of feminism:

> Hopefully someday we will be able to accomplish equal pay for equal work. So you see, feminists are not just a bunch of man-hating, flannel wearing, women who don't shave their armpits. (CyberGrls 6/22/04)

> Feminism is not just a bunch of masculine, butch women who don't shave their legs or armpits and go around screaming. (CyberGrls 6/22/04)

> But my time here as turned me into an even bigger feminist and I want equal pay for equal work. Women are still not fully equal to men. I also am very feminine in my look. We are not all man haters. (CyberGrls 7/8/04)

By not only reinforcing their straightness (references to future husbands and nuclear families were extremely common during these discussions), but through the employment of cultural symbols that have been coded as "dyke-like," such as flannel shirts and unshaven body parts, these girls further separate themselves from the specter of lesbianism. The last example also points to the importance for girls to align themselves with positions of power, in this case, men. Because the cultural space allotted to lesbians allows for only two images, the lipstick lesbian (who actively courts the male gaze) and

the man-hating dyke, it is central to disavow all association with the latter image in particular in order to access even limited sources of power.

What Is Never Said—Intersections and the Absent Presence of Class

When I was in 8th grade my family moved from a relatively class-homogeneous suburban area in New Jersey to rural Pennsylvania. This area in the eastern part of the state was primarily farmland that sub-developers were buying up and converting to large housing developments. The school district that was once populated by the children of the local farmers was now becoming increasingly class-diverse as the middle and upper middle class kids were moving into the new developments and attending the schools. I was one of those new upper middle class kids.

One morning as the school bus drove through my housing development, one of the boys on the bus asked me to say "I want an oompa loompa now!" quoting the spoiled Veruca Salt from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Though I knew that he was making fun of me, it is only now as I look back that I realize the ways that we were trying to make sense of social class and the inequality that was so evident as we came together in the same school.

At the time I had no language to talk about social class and in fact, I was told to not talk about it, as if the act of noticing class difference was the only factor in its persistence. Sociologists commonly use two terms to talk about class stratification: "socioeconomic status" (SES) and "class." While SES is often measured objectively through the use of specific markers of occupation, income, and education level, the concept of "class" carries a slightly different connotation. "Like definitions of gender

and race, references to 'class' (as opposed to SES) imply a particular relationship between social groups characterized by discrimination, power and/or exploitation" (Ostrove and Cole 2003:682). I will be working with this definition of class, one that is attentive to relations of power and inequality, as I analyze the ways that young people took up issues of class and how class identities and inequalities became relationally constructed during the course of online interaction.

"I wouldn't touch Wal-Mart, Target, or K-Mart's clothes"—Allusions to Class

Few topics were hinted at, suggested, and ignored as actively as class. Unlike race and gender, which were openly contested and debated as seen above, class existed largely as the absent presence in many threads. Often alluded to but rarely named (as in the thread about $50 shampoo), class inequality nevertheless shaped the tenor of these conversations and was recreated in these online spaces.

One of the only threads I collected to directly address class was a thread from the MusicVid site on school uniforms. In this thread, discussions of clothing become class narratives. Consider the following:

> As for myself, I wish there were uniforms. My family was dirt poor, I rarely got NEW clothes. The majority came from second hand stores or church donation bins while everyone else had designer lables (Yea right, like I was going to shell out $50 to wear a pair of pants that made me a walking bill board for the lable. Hell no.) So I was often laughed at for my worn out clothes and for generally being poor. Well we can't ALL leech out of mommy and daddies wallet. (MusicVid 6/15/04)

In this post there seems to be a level of anger and frustration at the class related inequalities that exist, as evidenced by the comments about designer labels and leeching from mommy and daddy. This post does contain an element of individualizing class inequality demonstrated in the final line "Well we can't ALL leech out of mommy and

dadies wallet." Here the poster implies that the "we" who are able to leech are to blame for social inequality—and in a way, this user is right. Although they did not situate their frustration within a system that upholds the unequal distribution of wealth, this poster is locating his anger with the more powerful group (the "we" and interestingly, the clothing designers).

This post sits in contrast to the response it received on the board. Consider the entry that appeared several posts later:

> i can relate more than you know. my mother raised me ALONE and we were also poor. getting new clothes was very similar to getting a new backpack (once a year, IF we were lucky)
> even with that being said, i realize that the entire school system can't revolve around the shortcomings of a minority of parents out there. basically, it's still taking away freedoms because of a few parents/children...
> WHY can't parents afford all this unnecessary clothing for their kids? i hate to say it; but it's because they're not that financially secure. not always a bad thing; but pointing that out gives them one more incentive to work harder, especially if they plan on being a parent. (MusicVid 6/15/04)

The latter user appears to have internalized cultural myths espousing meritocracy and individual achievement despite sharing the lower class status of the previous poster. If these parents who can't afford the "unnecessary clothing" would work harder, as motivated by their inability to buy appropriate amounts of clothing for their children, they could be "financially secure." Here financial security seems to be equated with upward mobility.

These findings support the assertions of other researchers who point to the impact of the "myth of meritocracy" on the ways that young people come to think about class. In their study of the ways that class is relevant to schooling, Michelle Fine and April Burns wrote, "Like a shimmering veneer laminating the knotty relations of class and

schooling, this belief [the belief in the myth of meritocracy] obscures inequalities..., camouflages structural group-level barriers, and points a damning finger at individuals who seem to be personally responsible when they don't succeed" (2003: 844). The ideologies of individualism, mobility, and capitalism that inform discourses of class in the United States function to not only hide the institutional influences on class stratification but also to blame those at the bottom of the economic ladder for their position (Fine and Burns 2003; Ostrove and Cole 2003).

In framing class location as the result of individual effort and merit, as seen in the previous posting, the young people on these sites are participating in upholding and recreating this dynamic of class experience that obscures the structural relations of power at work and often devalues others' lived experience of class inequality.

"White Bitches" and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) was interested in the ways that individuals are *multiply situated* within relations of power. There can be no experience of race that is not gendered and classed. Although social identities are frequently framed in isolated ways[12] race, class and gender are always experienced as intersections. Several threads on these boards point to the ways that experiences of race and gender are linked, and although class also appears to be relevant, it goes unnamed.

Consider the following excerpts from a thread titled "White Bitches:"

> **devilsangel**: Why do some people assume that all white girls wear hollister, are preppy, and are complete bitches? Well i'm none of those things and it freaks me out...in fact i have been called a white bitch and presonally i see it as racism and completely unfair.

[12] For example, the Rodney King police brutality case in 1992 was seen as primarily a race issue while Susan Smith's 1995 murder of her children was framed as only an issue of gender.

nymph-phan: the thing that i don't get is that there are these mexican people at my school that sit together everyday at the opposite end of the table as me and my friends(who happen to be white gurls & mexican gurls) and they call us all racist and preps. and i don't think that just cuz someone wears makeup and dresses nice for school is a prep.and plus my bf is half mexican.and i'm like the farthest thing from a prep and i just don't get it cuz i try to be nice an talk to these gurls in class and they are just so rude to me and at the lockers i try to be nice and they are just throw it up in my face. and i don't get it cuz it's like "hey i'm trying to be nice to you and kinda be friends so whats ur deal" so if someone could shine some light on that shadow it would b great.

dearabby: Yah I go to this magnet program and I had no idea it was like this when i first entered it but apparently they take all the kids from my side of town and they give us a 45 minute long bus drive to the other side of town(it's kind of in the ghetto but sorry it is...) and they we got to school at Eastside which would normally be all black people and a few white people mixed in(just because you go to that school because you live near there and I guess that majority of the people that live there are african americans, it's weird) So anyways...here we are a group of white kids going to this school of all blacks and we're in this "special smart people program" and it's very very uncomfortable because all of us just thought we were going to some magnet program, we didn't know that we would be set up so that it looks like blacks against whites. But apparently they put the magnet program there so it appears that there is racial diversity in the school and all parts of town. I'm sorry but this really pisses me off, first of all because i have to have an hour long bus ride because bush doesn't want to acknowledge the fact that one part of town is mostly all black and the other part is mixed between white and blakc and other races. It also pisses me off because then people automatically beleive that we're like "the white kids from the rich side of town that come over to be better than them" when that's not true. So yah it really really sucks because i guess they all assume that you're racist and so they like, pull your hair and trip you in the hallways and will cuss you out from being white. One girl tripped me outside and screamed "white girl get your dumbass out of the way" and I still have this ugly scar on my knee like 3 years later...

julie_grl: he he he...apparently, i'm a total white bitch. but i really do shop at hollister (and gap, and ae, and af...) and i guess i take it lightly. seriously, why would someone try to bring me down if they weren't threatened. i'm a bitch at times, but who isn't? and i white, but i can't help that...

(CyberGrls 6/24/04)

As discussed earlier, the posters on this thread take no issue with the use of the term "bitches" and its relationship to gender oppression, but instead focus on the racial aspects of the slur. This term, however, is clearly about both race *and* gender, as all targets and posters on this thread appear to be female. In addition, *devilsangel*, *nymph-phan*, *dearabby*, and *julie_grl* all seem to be subtly pointing to the ways that this term also

implies a classed identity. Although these postings initially appear to be only about the perceived racism connoted in the term "white bitches," class is clearly relevant as well.

For example, the initial question posed by *devilsangel* and the final posting by *julie_grl* make clear that this phrase is not given to just any white girls, but those who wear clothes from Hollister and are preppy. Ostrove and Cole (2003) point out that many terms used to describe ethnic and/or racial groups are also class coded, for example "WASP" and "inner-city youth." Here the term "preppy" is not simply coded as white, but also implies a middle class or upper middle class location, particularly when paired with particular stores such as Hollister, the Gap, and Abercrombie and Fitch. The use of these terms with hidden class codes serves to "conflate race and class in the minds both of those who use the terms, and of those who are labeled by them" (Ostrove and Cole 2003:681). As a result, race becomes the visible target while the classed implications of the term remain hidden.

However, *dearabby* is clearly writing about the lived experience of her class privilege, although she frames it in terms of racial privilege. She works to make sense of the racial politics at work in her schooling situation as seen with her statement: "apparently they put the magnet program there so it appears that there is racial diversity in the school and all parts of town. I'm sorry but this really pisses me off, first of all because i have to have an hour long bus ride because bush doesn't want to acknowledge the fact that one part of town is mostly all black and the other part is mixed between white and blakc and other races." However, the classed components of this geographic segregation go largely unchallenged. While she does point out that "people automatically

beleive that we're like 'the white kids from the rich side of town that come over to be better than them,'" hinting at the class inequalities at work, the following line returns to race as she states that "they all assume that you're racist."

In her study of the ways that young women talk about racial and class oppression, Sandra Jones uncovered the difficulty experienced by marginalized people when trying to articulate their oppression. "Although Whites are racially privileged [...] White working class students were at a disadvantage in terms of their awareness of systems of oppressions and their ability to name the marginalization they experience" (Jones 2003:815). From the postings above, it appears that these girls, although racially and class privileged, they are unable to name their marginalization. Unaware of or unable to articulate the system of oppressions at work, girls seem to be using the term "white bitch" to sanction other girls along the axes of not only race and gender, but also class.

While the discussion thus far has illustrated the ways in which these online spaces serve to recreate gender, racial, and class oppression of the off-line world, there was also compelling evidence of the emancipatory potential of Internet bulletin boards for young people. This paper will conclude with an examination of the ways that kids do not simply reproduce inequality, but instead actively participate in an online community working to challenge dominant discourses of oppression.

CONCLUSION

Disrupting the Center—The Potential of Online Spaces

As I have shown, social inequalities are actively reproduced and upheld by young people in online spaces. However, these sites also have the potential to disrupt traditional notions of gender, race, and class in meaningful ways. Although I have already presented several examples of disruptive moments throughout my analysis, I want to point out two larger findings that indicate the subversive potential of the Internet's interactional spaces.

First, the bulletin boards that I observed seemed to illicit rich and complex discussions of issues of racial, gender and class inequalities that I have rarely observed elsewhere. After spending several years working in high schools, four years as a high school student myself, and this past semester as a teaching assistant for an introductory sociology course, I have never witnessed the types of critical dialogue that were exchanged in these online forums. That is certainly not to say that these types of discussions are not occurring, but schools do not seem to be fostering critical debates of social issues.

On each of the forums I visited during the course of this research, young people are making sincere and significant attempts to talk through and talk across racial, gender, sexual, and class differences. Unlike schools, in which the environment, curriculum, and corporeal experience is dictated by adults, these online spaces become a site where youth are setting the agenda and directing the discussions. They are *actively* (re)creating their social worlds in ways that appear to offer a greater sense of agency to youth than the more traditional youth space of the school.

One of the young people I interviewed described his experience of online communication in the following way:

> You can talk to anybody...it doesn't have to be family, friends. It could be some guy over the ocean that you met over some game, some website, whatever, and...It's a lot easier to communicate that way because you're not face to face so a lot of qualms that people have about, like, talking to people...all of that is eliminated because all you have is just text. (17-year-old middle-class white male)

While it is unclear which specific "qualms" he is referring to here, it is evident that there are aspects of text-based online spaces that make communication "a lot easier." Due to the "text-only" nature of computer-mediated communication and the ability to construct (and reconstruct) online identities, bulletin boards may be a safe space to engage in radical discussions where the social costs are relatively low. Future research on youth and the Internet should examine the conventions and characteristics of online spaces that seem to allow, and even encourage, critical discussion and debate of social issues.

In addition to the critical discussions that take place on these boards, there is also the opportunity for young people to redefine these spaces in ways that may not align with adult intentions for the sites. There is a certain amount of agency available to young people in these spaces, as seen in their ability to utilize their electronic voices to redefine the purposes of the forum. For example, although the bulletin boards on the *Teen TV* site were presumably intended to be used to boost viewership of the affiliated television network, one thread instead encouraged a boycott.

Consider the following excerpts from a thread titled "How many have actually stopped watching [Teen TV]?":[13]

---

[13] The actual names of the station and shows have been changed to protect the anonymity of the site and the participants.

> **John Matt 23**: *raises hand*. I haven't watched a single thing on that channel since the finale. [Teen TV]'s dead to me. I only come on this board to talk to my friends.
>
> **Brokenfan**: Their line up is horrible..how come the audience hasnt like leaked it out or shouted it out...YOU SUCK!
>
> **Beanie2552**: I have stopped watching totally...It is my boycott...of [Teen TV]...I am hoping it will show in the numbers in the fall...
>
> **EveBethoven**: Shelled out the extra bucks to pick up the [Teen TV] station just to watch [Gabriel]. With the demise of [Gabriel], I'm gonna save the extra bucks by canceling [Teen TV]. Haven't tuned into [Teen TV] since the [Gabriel] finale and see no reason to tune into that waste of space network again.
>
> (Teen TV 6/16/04)

In this discussion, fans disappointed in the programming choices, including the cancellation of a popular show, express not only their anger but also the fact that they no longer watch the network. While not a direct call to action, this thread does have the feel of a protest, organized not on the streets but on the World Wide Web. Not simply a place to talk about characters or recent episodes aired on the network (although that occurs often), this board has become a space for young people to connect with others and engage in a form of civic action.

A Look to the Future

While this research has yielded interesting results and valuable findings, the study of young people online and youth cybercultures is still in its infancy. Research that more directly connects the online *and* offline experiences of young people would be a valuable addition to this new field of study. For example, I found that the interviews I conducted before my online data collection were invaluable in framing the problem I was interested in researching and directing my Internet fieldwork. However, because my interview subjects and fieldwork participants were selected from different populations, it was difficult to connect the two data sets. In the future, it would be valuable to interview the

actual participants of the online sites, perhaps utilizing instant messaging or email technologies. In her ethnography of the BlueSky forum, Lori Kendall (2000) offers an example of this dual approach with adult informants.

In addition, critical study of the ways that online interaction is situated within offline commercial youth culture would also offer insight into the connection between on and offline spaces. Each of the forums I researched was tied to specific commercial interests and with the continued expansion of the World Wide Web, efforts are constantly being made to capitalize on cyberspaces. As seen in the threads on clothing stores, rappers, pop stars, and television shows, young people are working through race, class, and gender in ways that are intertwined with commercial popular culture. Further research on this connection, specifically as it related to youth cyberspaces, would enhance this field of study.

In response to the lack of critical sociological literature about the ways that youth interact in cyberspace, this project was designed as an exploratory study. My project is only an introductory contribution to the relatively new dialogue of youth and computer-mediated communication. I hope other voices soon enter the discussion.

REFERENCES

Auther, Jennifer. 1999. "California is the latest southwestern state to be infested." *CNN*, January 14. Accessed November 5, 2004 from cnn.com

Bajak, Frank. 1993. "Around the World in 80 Megabytes: Everybody's Plugging into the Internet." Pp. A4 in *The Salt Lake Tribune*. Salt Lake City.

Bennett, Andy. 2000. *Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity and Place*. New York: St. Martins Press.

Blumer, Herbert. 1969. "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism," pp. 1-60 in *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University California Press.

Brake, Mike. 1980. *The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures: Sex Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll?* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Brown, Lyn Mikel. 2003. *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection Among Girls*. New York: New York University Press.

Burkhalter, Byron. 2000. "Reading Race Online: Discovering Racial Identity in Usenet Discussions." Pp. 60-75 in *Communities in Cyberspace*, edited by M. Smith and P. Kollock. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Clark, Lynn Schofield. 1998. "Dating on the Net: Teens and the Rise of "Pure" Relationships." Pp. 159-183 in *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, edited by S. Jones. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Coffey, Amanda, and Paul Atkinson. 1996. *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Corsaro, William A. 1992. "Interpretive Reproduction in Children's Peer Cultures." *Social Psychological Quarterly* 5, 2: 160-177.

------. 1997. *The Sociology of Childhood*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Danet, Brenda. 1998. "Text as Mask: Gender, Play, and Performance on the Internet."

Pp. 129-158 in *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, edited by S. Jones. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

DeBell, Matthew and Chris Chapman. 2003. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Computer and Internet Use by Children and Adolescents in 2001*, NCES 2004–014, Washington, DC

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ess, Charles, and the AoIR ethics working committee. 2002. *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee*. Retreived February 25, 2004 (www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf).

Esterberg, Kristin G. 2002. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Ferguson, Ann Arnett. 2000. *Bad Boys: Public School in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Fine, Michelle. 1993. "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire." Pp. 75-99 in *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in United States Schools*, edited by L. Weis and M. Fine. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Fine, Michelle and April Burns. 2003. "Class Notes: Toward a Critical Psychology of Class and Schooling." *Journal of Social Issues* 59 (4):841-860.

Fine, Michelle and Pat Macpherson. 1992. "Over Dinner: Feminism and Adolescent Female Bodies." Pp. 175-204 in *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research*, edited by M. Fine. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Garfinkel, Harold and Harvey Sacks. 1970. "On Formal Structures of Practical Actions." Pp. 338-366 in *Theoretical Sociology*, edited by J. McKinney and E. Tiryakian. New York: Appleton Century Crofts.

Gibson, William. 1984. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books.

Giroux, Henry. 1996. *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence, and Youth*. New York: Routledge.

------. 1997. *Channel Surfing: Racism, the Media, and the Destruction of Today's Youth.* New York: St. Martins Griffin.

Glaser, Barney, G. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Grodin, Debra and Thomas Lindlof. 1996. " The Self and Mediated Communication." Pp. 3-11 in *Constructing the Self in a Mediated World*, edited by D. Grodin and T. Lindlof. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Hall, Kira. 1996. "Cyberfeminism." Pp. 147-170 in *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by S. Herring. Philadelphia: John Benhamins Publishing Company.

Haraway, Donna. 1994. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." Pp. 424-457 in *Theorizing Feminism*, edited by A. Herrmann and A. Stewart. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Hardey, Michael. 2002. "Life Beyond the Screen: Embodiment and Identity Through the Internet." *The Sociological Review* 50: 570-585.

Heins, Marjorie. 2002. "Filtering Fever." Pp. 180-200 in *Not in Front of the Children: "Indecency," Censorship and the Innocence of Youth.* New York: Hill and Wang.

Herring, Susan C. 1996. "Introduction." Pp. 1-10 in *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by S. Herring. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Hine, Christine. 2000. *Virtual Ethnography.* London: SAGE Publishing.

Holloway, Sarah and Gill Valentine. 2003. *Cyberkids: Children in the Information Age.* London: Routledge.

Ignacio, Emily. 2000. "Ain't I A Filipino (Woman)?: An Analysis of Authorship/ Authority Through the Construction of "Filipina" on the Net." *The Sociological Quarterly.* 41(4), 551-572.

James, Allison and Alan Prout. 1990. "A New Paradigm for the Sociology of

Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems." Pp. 7-34 in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, edited by A. James and A. Prout. London: The Falmer Press.

Jones, Sandra J. 2003. "Complex Subjectivities: Class, Ethnicity, and Race in Women's Narratives of Upward Mobility." *Journal of Social Issues* 59 (4):803-820.

Kendall, Lori. 2000. " 'Oh No! I'm a Nerd!' Hegemonic Masculinity on an Online Forum." *Gender and Society*. 14(2), 256-274.

Kolko, Beth. 2000. "Erasing @race: Going White in the (Inter)Face." Pp. 213-232 in *Race in Cyberspace*, edited by B. Kolko, L. Nakamura, and G. Rodman. New York: Routledge.

Kravets, David. 2004. "California Supreme Court blocks San Francisco gay marriages." *SFGate*, March 11. Retrieved September 12, 2004 (http://sfgate.com/cgibin/article.cgi%3Ff=/news/a/2004/03/11/state1733EST0130.DTL).

Lee, Henry. 2004. "'Riders' defense attorney call witnesses self-serving." *SF Gate*, November 4. Retrieved November 5, 2004 (http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/11/04/BAG0V9LLMT1.DTL).

Lesko, Nancy. 1988. *Symbolizing Society: Stories, Rites and Structure in a Catholic High School*. New York: The Falmer Press.

Lipton, Mark. 1996. "Forgetting the Body: Cybersex and Identity." Pp. 335-349 in *Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment*, edited by L. Strate, R. Jacobson, and S. Gibson. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Mann, Chris and Fiona Stewart. 2000. *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research: A Handbook for Researching Online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

McRobbie, Angela and Jenny Garber. 1976. "Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration" Pp. 209-222 in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, edited by edited by S. Hall and T. Jefferson. London: Routledge.

Mitchell, Claudia and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh. 2002. "Virtual Spaces: Children on the Cyber Frontier." Pp. 141-170 in *Researching Children's Popular Culture: The Cultural Spaces of Childhood*. London: Routledge.

Oakley, Ann. 1972. *Sex, Gender and Society*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row.

O'Brien, Jodi. 2000. "Writing in the Body: Gender (Re)Production in Online Interaction." Pp. 76-104 in *Communities in Cyberspace*, edited by M. Smith and P. Kollock. New York: Routledge.

Ostrove, Joan M. and Elizabeth R. Cole. 2003. "Privileging Class: Toward a Critical Psychology of Social Class in the Context of Education." *Journal of Social Issues* 59 (4):677-692.

Perry, Pamela. 2002. *Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identities in High School.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Piaget, Jean. 1932. *The Moral Judgment of the Child.* London: Routledge & Kegan.

------. 1968. *Six Psychological Studies.* New York: Vintage.

Poster, Mark. 1998. "Virtual Ethnicity: Tribal Identity in an Age of Global Communication." Pp. 184-211 in *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, edited by S. Jones. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Rheingold, Howard. 1993. *The Virtual Community.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 2002. "Positioning Gender Identity in Narratives of Infertility: South Indian Women's Lives in Context." Pp. 152-170 in *Infertility Around the Globe*, edited by M. Inhorn and F. von Balen. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Roberts, Gregory. 1993. "Computer Link is a Revolution, Smitten Users Say." Pp. A1 in *Times-Picayune.* New Orleans.

Smith, Barbara. 1993. "Homophobia: Why Bring It Up?" Pp. 99-102 in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by H. Abelove, M. Barale, and D. Halperin. New York: Routledge.

Smith, Dorothy E. 1987. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology.* Boston: Northeastern Press.

Smyres, Kerrie. 1999. "Virtual Corporeality: Adolescent Girls and Their Bodies in Cyberspace." *Cybersociology*, 6 (16 pages). Retrieved February 26, 2004 (www.socio.demon.co.uk/magazine/6/smyres.html).

Sorisio, Carolyn. 1997. "A Tale of Two Feminisms: Power and Victimization in

Contemporary Feminist Debate." Pp. 155-167 in *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, edited by L. Heywood and J. Drake. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Springhall, John. 1998. *Youth, Popular Culture, and Moral Panics.* New York: St. Martins Press.

Thorne, Barrie. 1993. *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Turkle, Sherry. 1995. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

------. 1996. "Parallel Lives: Working on Identity in Virtual Space." Pp. 156-175 in *Constructing the Self in a Mediated World*, edited by D. Grodin and T. Lindlof. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Walkerdine, Valerie, Helen Lucey, and June Melody. 2001. *Growing Up Girl: Psychosocial Explorations of Gender and Class.* Washington Square, NY: New York University Press.

Warner, Michael. 1999. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life.* New York: The Free Press.

Warschauer, Mark. 2000. "Language, Identity, and the Internet." Pp. 151-170 in *Race in Cyberspace*, edited by B. Kolko, L. Nakamura, and G. Rodman. New York: Routledge.

Wellman, David. 1993. *Portrait of White Racism.* 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1(2): 125-151.

Willis, Paul. 1977. *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs.* Westmead, England: Saxon House.

Zurawski, Nils. 1999. "Among the Internauts: Notes from the Cyberfield." *Cybersociology*, 6 (9 pages). Retrieved February 26, 2004 (www.socio.demon.co.uk/magazine/6/zurawski.html).

APPENDIX

Letter of Approval from Institutional Review Board

San José State
UNIVERSITY

Office of the Academic Vice President
Academic Vice President Graduate Studies and Research
One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0025
Voice: 408-283-7500
Fax: 408-924-2477
E-mail: gradstudies@sjsu.edu
http://www.sjsu.edu

To: Alyssa R. Richman
1775 Milmont Dr., Apt#S308
Milpitas, CA 95035

From: Pam Stacks,
Interim AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

Date: June 29, 2004

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"Youth, Identity and Cyperspace: A Qualitative Study of Teens in Online Interactional Spaces."

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Pam Stacks, Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subjects portion of your project is in effect for one year, and data collection beyond June 29, 2005 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.

cc: Dr. Susan Murray